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ABSTRACT

Students in grades three and four are introduced to the concepts of abstract reasoning, ambiguity, and interpersonal relationships in this philosophic reader. The story involves mystery and myth and works with literary techniques of similie and metaphor. Pixie is introduced as a precocious character who is impatient with other people, a tease, and a mimic. While she lectures to other people she unknowingly makes blunders, yet she possesses a certain degree of self-knowledge and insight. Incidents in the story such as a breakfast-time quarrel focus on family relationships and the difference between right and wrong. The "Pixie" course deals with strengthening the awareness of relationships (logical, social, familial, aesthetic, causal, part-whole, mathematical, etc.) as well as the competence in dealing with such relationships. An attempt to dress in the dark illustrates how perplexing a person's experience can be and how distorted perceptions can become. In the final chapters, four people retell the story that Pixie has told them, introducing students to the difference between individuals who create stories and those who are story tellers. (KC)

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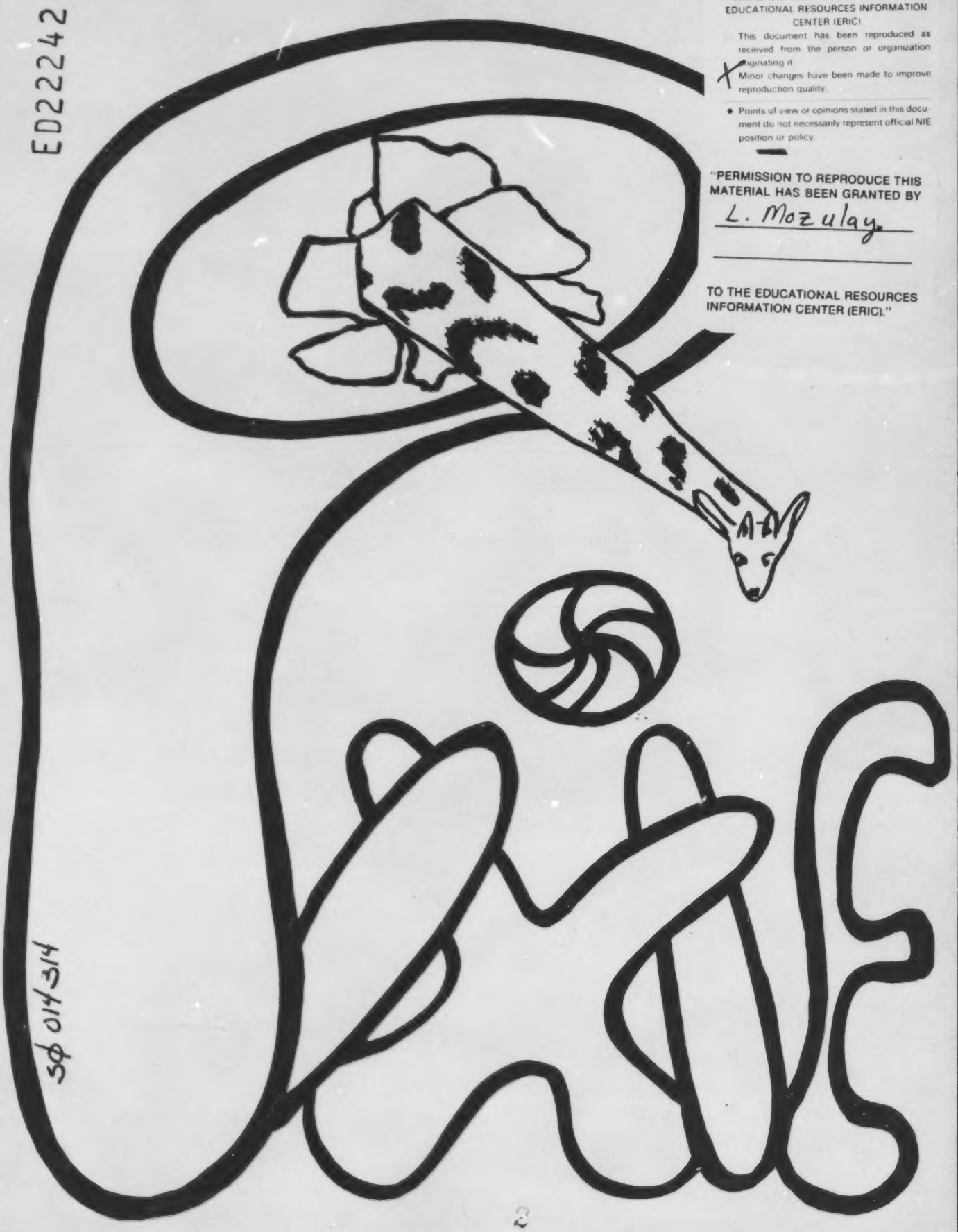

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CHAPTER ONE

Now it's *my* turn! I had to wait *so long* for the others to tell their stories!

I'll start by telling you my name. My name is Pixie. Pixie's not my real name. My real name my father and mother gave me. Pixie's the name I gave myself.

How old am I? The same age you are.

I can cross my legs and walk on my knees. My father says I act like I'm made of rubber. Last night I put my feet around my neck and walked on my hands!

No, you can't cross your legs *and* put them around your neck at the same time! One or the other, but not both! What do you want to do — turn yourself into a pretzel?

My mother says I act like I'm made of vinegar. I don't know what vinegar is. It's probably something nice, like ice cream.

My story's real long, so you might as well settle down. (I'm much more patient this year than I was last year. Last year I would have said, "Settle down! I'm not going to tell you any more until you do. I have lots I can think about while I'm waiting.")

It's funny! I don't like to talk like that any more! I just want to get on with my story.

* * *

The reason I made up a story is that everyone in the class had to make up a story. What I want to tell you now is the story of how my story got made up. First there's the story, and then there's the story of how it happened. What I mean is, first it had to happen, and then *afterwards* came the story. So this is the story of what came first. It's the story of how it happened.

We didn't even know we had to make up a story until Mr. Mulligan told us about going to the zoo.

Mr. Mulligan's our teacher. His ears stick out a little, the way mine do. But I can make my ears wiggle, and he can't. (I don't mean, he can't make *my* ears wiggle. I mean, he can't make *his own* ears wiggle!)

Mr. Mulligan's so old! Can you imagine, he has a daughter who's going to have a baby! He has *really* been around a long time! I wonder if he knew Abraham Lincoln. (Last year I would have asked him, but now I know better.)

Anyhow, Mr. Mulligan told us we were going to take a trip to the zoo, and afterwards he wanted each of us to make up a story about the trip. Or about the animals we saw. Or about the places the animals came from. Or about how the animals were captured and brought to the zoo.

"Your story can be about anything a zoo makes you think of," Mr. Mulligan said.

I remember very clearly his telling us that. That's why, when I made up my story, it wasn't about a zoo at all, but about something the zoo made me think of.

* * *

When Mr. Mulligan told us about the plans for the zoo trip, we all said "Hooray!" and "Yay!" and "Gee wow!" Everyone except Neil.

Neil said, "Who wants to go to an old zoo, anyhow?" And he made a face and held his nose.

That made me mad. Really mad. I said, "Neil, you're so smart! How do you think *you'd* smell if *you* had to stay in a cage all day long?"

All he did was stick out his tongue at me. Naturally I made a face back at him, with my thumbs in my ears and cross-eyed.

Then he told me I had bubblegum stuck in my hair, and that wasn't true at all! I'm sure I'd gotten it all out!

Boy, some people!

* * *

Just before Mr. Mulligan let us go for lunch, he leaned back in his chair and cleaned his glasses for a minute. Then he said, "About the zoo trip — one more thing. There's something I want each of you to do. I want you each to have a secret, and don't tell *anyone!*"

I said, "Mr. Mulligan, not even our best friend?"

"Not even your best friend," he told me.

"Not even *you?*" Nikki asked, and Mr. Mulligan said, "Not even me."

Then Isabel spoke up. Isabel's who I meant when I said that about my best friend. She's my best friend. She said, "What *kind* of secret, Mr. Mulligan?"

He said, "I want you each to think of some animal or some bird or some reptile that's a favorite of yours. And that will be your *mystery creature.* When you go through the zoo with the rest of the class, keep your eyes open for your mystery creature. And then when you see it, think of how you might put your mystery creature in your story. The day after the zoo trip, when we're back here in class, we'll each tell our mystery creature stories."

I was so excited! Because I didn't have to think what my mystery creature would be; I knew right away. And I was sure no one else would have the same one as mine. Oh, I just couldn't wait to see it!

As we started out the door on our way to the cafeteria, I could hear Tommy whispering to Kate, trying to find out what her mystery creature was going to be.

Walking down the hall, Isabel and I held hands, like we always do. We didn't talk, because each of us was thinking. I was thinking how lucky I was to have a friend who wouldn't try to get my secret out of me. Maybe she

was thinking the same thing, because all of a sudden she stopped and hugged me, and I hugged her back — right at the top of the stairs. Then we went on down the stairs to the lunchroom.

* * *

Later that afternoon, as I was sitting at my desk, I began thinking about my secret creature again. Isabel says I looked like I was daydreaming.

Anyhow, my chin was resting on my hand, and my elbow was on the desk.

I don't know how long I sat like that, but it must have been a long time. All of a sudden, I remembered I was in class. And then I realized something funny. Do you know what?

My arm had gone to sleep.

I still can't figure it out. If all of me was awake, how could part of me be asleep?

It was asleep, all right. I couldn't use it. It just sort of hung down off my shoulder. I couldn't even feel it, except maybe a little tingle.

Have *you* ever had *your* arm go to sleep? Isn't it weird? It's like it doesn't even belong to you! How could part of you not belong to you? All of you belongs to you!

But you see, that's what puzzles me. Either my body and I are the same, or they're not the same.

If my body and I are the same, then *it* can't belong to *me.*

And if my body and I are different, then who am *I?*

It's beginning to sound like *I'm* the one who's some sort of mystery creature!

Afterwards, when I talked to Isabel about it, she said, "Pixie, you worry too much. Look, there's really no problem. Your body belongs to you and you belong to your body."

"Sure," I said, "but do I belong to my body *in the same way* that my body belongs to me?"

* * *

I looked at Brian, and wished I could talk to him about my arm falling asleep. But I knew that would be a waste of time. Brian wouldn't answer me. He wouldn't speak at all — to anyone.

Brian hadn't spoken in years.

We asked Mr. Mulligan if there was anything wrong with Brian, but he said no, he just doesn't want to talk.

I even tried. I really did. I went over and sat down next to Brian, and I said, "Brian, my arm fell asleep just now."

He just looked at me for a moment, and then looked away.

So I said, "It felt like it was made of rubber. Like it

wasn't my arm at all." He still kept looking away.

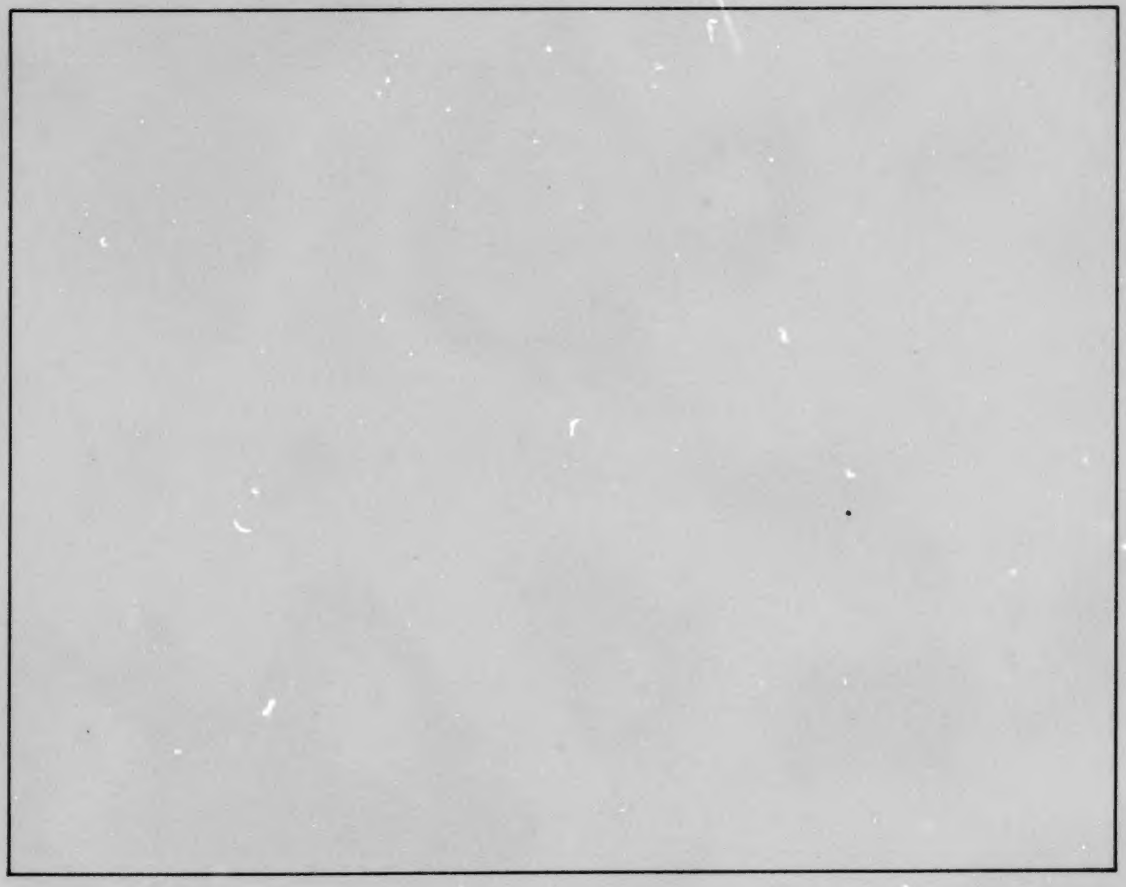
Then I said, "How would *you* like it, Brian, if *your* arm felt like it was made of rubber?"

That's when he turned and looked at me. He just kept staring at me, with those eyes of his that seem to look right through you. So I got up and went back to my seat.

Isabel says Brian has the eyes of a wolf. I don't know how that can be.

It's like my mother telling me all the time that I have my father's mouth.

It's like the question I had before: how could part of me belong to someone else?



CHAPTER TWO

"Isabel," I said, "how can Brian make up a story about his mystery creature if he never says anything?"

Isabel answered, "Oh, he can make one up, but he won't *talk* about it. He'll just keep thinking about it until he writes it down."

"Is that the sort of thing that goes on in his mind all the time?" I asked. "He tells himself stories he's made up?"

"It's possible," said Isabel. "With Brian, anything's possible."

I like Isabel. She's just like me in all the things I like about myself. And she's different from me in all the things I don't like about myself.

Her hair and her eyebrows are the blackest black, and her eyes are the same yellow and brown as the day-lilies that grow in a clump near the handball court.

* * *

That night, at dinner, I told my father and mother about the zoo trip, and how we had to make up stories about our mystery creatures. But I didn't tell them about my secret.

I didn't tell Miranda either. Just because she's my sister, and she's two years older than I am, and we share the same room, I don't have to tell her *everything!*

Besides, does she ever show me that book she's always writing things in? And does she let me stand around and listen when her friend, Sue, comes over? All that whispering and giggling they do!

Right in front of me she'll say to Sue, "Wait a minute, I've got to get rid of my kid sister." Oh, I can't tell you how much I *hate* her when she does that!

Still, we usually get along okay. Except that she always hogs the bed, and I have to push her to make her get back over on her side. On her side of the bed, I mean.

* * *

I know you want me to get on with my story. But all these things that happened to me — well, in a way, they had something to do with the story I made up. So I really have to tell you about them.

Besides, it's not nice to be *pushy!*

Okay, maybe sometimes I do talk about things that

aren't connected with the story. Like the fact that I can do three cartwheels in a row. That has nothing to do with my story. But can *you* do three cartwheels in a row?

Don't look at me that way! See what you made me do! I almost forgot to tell you about what happened that night.

I woke up in the middle of the night because I was having a funny kind of dream. Not a bad one, really, but just a little spooky.

The street light by our window was out, so it was completely dark in our room. Then I realized that something was lying across my right leg. I figured it was Miranda, so I gave it a push and I said "Miranda, get your ol' leg off me!"

But the leg just slowly swung back, and stopped where it had been before.

Then I pushed it away again, and I was kind of mad, and I said, "Miranda, cut it out!" But the leg slowly came back, once again.

So I reached down and grabbed it. It felt like it was made of rubber. It bent any old way I turned it.

I pulled her foot close to my face so I could look at it. And do you know what? It looked very familiar. In fact, it looked just like *my* foot.

In fact, it *was* my foot! It had fallen asleep, and that made me think it was Miranda's!

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The next morning, when I told Miranda about it, I asked her, "Do you think that, if my head falls asleep, I'll think it's yours?"

Miranda looked at the cat, which was chasing its tail on the kitchen floor, and said, "Eat your cereal."

See, that's the big difference between Miranda and me. She never sees anything as a problem! It's not that she thinks she knows all the answers. It's just that she isn't even *interested* in the questions!

* * *

Miranda ran to the bathroom ahead of me, then locked the door from the inside, just to keep me out.

I banged on the door with my fist, and I said, "Miranda, that's no fair! I've got as much right to use the bathroom as you do!"

I could hear her brushing her teeth, but she stopped a minute and yelled back, "Wait your turn." I could tell from the way she said it that she had a mouthful of toothpaste. I wished she'd swallow it. "Hey!" I said, as loud as I could, "turn that water down! Don't you know there's a water shortage?"

I kept banging on the door with my fist. I yelled "Miranda, being eleven years old doesn't give you the right to push people around!" To myself I thought, "When I'm eleven who will *I* be able to push around? Nobody!"

Just then she let me in. Not because she was sorry for me, but because she was through in the bathroom.

If she was hoping I might tell her my secret about the mystery creature, she could just forget it. At least, that's what I hoped she was hoping.

* * *

That was Tuesday morning. Wednesday morning wasn't any better.

At breakfast, I'm the only one who has cereal. Everyone else in our family has scrambled eggs. And everyone picks on me.

"Pixie," my mother says, "use a napkin. You're going to dribble milk all over your dress."

"Pixie," my father says, "don't fill your bowl up so high. You always leave half of it. A person could live on what you waste."

"Pixie," Miranda says, "don't put the sugar over your cereal first. Put the milk on, and then the sugar."

My father's right. I waste food. My mother's right: I make a mess of myself when I eat. Everybody's right: I dawdle.

But Miranda makes me sick. What difference does it make whether I put the sugar on first, or the milk on first?

Lots of things are right and lots of things are wrong, but *some* things don't seem to be one or the other.

Sometimes I wonder how Miranda would like it if I kept telling her which of her shoes to put on first. Or that it's okay to sneeze once but not twice. Or that it's okay to bite the fingernails on your left hand but not the ones on your right.

Maybe I'll make up a really big fib and tell her that people who squeeze the toothpaste tube from the top instead of from the bottom get hairy eyelids.

Hairy eyelids — oh, wow, talk about *gross!*

CHAPTER THREE

I was watching Brian out of the corner of my eye, and I saw Willa Mae come along and take him by the hand. She led him over to the book corner, and they sat down on a couple of stools. She talked to him real quiet like, and he would look at her eyes, then her mouth, then her eyes again.

I couldn't help wondering, why would anyone just stop talking? I talk all the time; I *never* stop. I can't even *imagine* what it would be like to be silent all the time.

Isabel was reading a book, but I interrupted her. "Isabel," I said, "why do people talk?"

Isabel pursed her lips, like she was going to whistle, and then she said slowly, "I guess if people talk, it's because they want to let other people know what they think and feel."

"But suppose they don't *want* to let other people know what they think and feel," I said.

Isabel thought for a minute, then she said, "Then, maybe, they stop talking."

* * *

Tommy said to me, "Pixie, the zoo trip is a week from Wednesday, and I can't think of a secret creature. Do you have one picked out?"

I said, "Of course! But you don't think I'd tell *you* what it is, do you? As a matter of fact, I wouldn't tell anyone!"

"I'm not asking you to tell me," he said. "But couldn't you just give me a suggestion? All I can think of are cats and dogs and horses and cows, and *they're* not in the zoo."

I don't know why I did it. I wasn't trying to be mean. I just wanted to have some fun. I mean, Tommy teases me sometimes, so I thought this time I'd tease him.

"Okay," I said, "why not pick a unicorn to be your mystery creature?"

"A unicorn?" he asked. You could see from his face he'd never heard of it. "What's that?"

"It's like a horse, but it has a long, pointy horn coming out of the middle of its forehead."

"Gee, thanks, Pixie," Tommy said. "I sure needed some help."

I thought to myself, "Wait 'til he tries to find a unicorn in the zoo. Oh, I'd love to see his face when he finds out there's no such animal!"

* * *

It was Wednesday night. I kept thinking about the zoo trip, and about Isabel and Tommy and Brian and Willa Mae, and I couldn't sleep. I guess I was pushing my tongue against my teeth when suddenly I realized that two of my teeth were loose.

In fact, they were so loose I could get the tip of my tongue between them and my gum. I jumped out of bed and ran across the hall. "Momma, momma," I yelled, "my teeth are all coming out!"

My mother sort of groaned. Then she said, "Of course, dear, they're your *baby* teeth. You've already lost most of them. In time they'll *all* drop out."

That's when I began to sniffle. "Momma," I said, "what happens if my baby teeth fall out, and I don't get new ones?"

Before my mother could answer, my father said, "We'll get you false ones."

I tried to imagine myself looking into a mirror: nine years old and false teeth!

Then I said, "Daddy, how does a tooth know when to come out?"

"It doesn't know," he said. "It gets pushed out."

"By what? By my tongue?"

"No, by the new tooth that's growing underneath it."

I thought about that. Then I said, "Daddy, if I don't

get new teeth, couldn't we just *plant* a few, like you plant a little tree? Wouldn't they take root just like a tree, Daddy?'' I poked him a little because he was starting to go back to sleep. ''Wouldn't it, huh, wouldn't it?''

''They say that if you pull a lizard's tail off, it will grow a new one. Or, you can plant a little tail there and it will grow. Or you can plant a lizard's foot there, and if it doesn't stay a foot, it may turn into a tail.''

''Daddy,'' I said, ''you aren't making any sense. What do lizard's tails have to do with people's teeth?''

''Pixie's right, Ralph,'' my mother said. ''The two things aren't alike at all. And anyhow, is it true that you can replant a lizard's tail, or is that something you just invented?''

''I can't remember where I read it,'' my father said. ''I'm not sure. Maybe I made the whole thing up.''

By this time I was getting sleepy, and before I knew it, I had fallen asleep between Mommy and Daddy. And I dreamed about a lizard that had lost its tail, so somebody put a little foot where the lizard's tail had been. But the little foot didn't know what to be when it grew up. It could become either a foot or a tail, but it didn't know which. It was so confused! It kept getting bigger and bigger, and it knew it had to decide soon. But it just couldn't make up its mind what to be.

That's all I can remember of my dream.

* * *

After school, I went home with Isabel. She lives in an apartment on the 18th floor. I pressed all the buttons on the elevator, so it had to stop at each floor. It made everyone have to wait, and when they'd get on, they were real mad. I don't think I'll do that any more.

The only persons at Isabel's were her mother and her sister, Connie. Connie doesn't go to school yet. She said to me, "Hi, Pixie, we're going to my grandmother's for Thanksgiving."

Thanksgiving seemed a long way off to me. But I said to Connie, "That's nice. Who'll be there besides your grandmother?"

Connie looked puzzled and looked to Isabel for help. Isabel said, "The family," so Connie repeated, "The family."

"Like who?" I asked. "Your aunts and your uncles?"

"Oh, sure," Isabel replied. "And my cousins, They'll all be there."

"And the family," said Connie.

Isabel laughed. "Oh, no, Connie," she said. "Don't say, '*and* the family.' The family isn't *in addition to* us and grandma and our cousins and uncles and aunts."

Connie looked real hard at Isabel. I could tell she couldn't understand what Isabel was saying. "Let me try," I said. "Connie, when all your relatives are together, they're called your 'family'."

Connie said, "Oh." Then she added, "What about when they're not together? Are they still the family?"

"Of course," Isabel said.

"So my family is made up of people who are related to me?" Connie asked.

"That's right — all your relatives, and only your relatives," I said.

Connie looked at me. "Do you have a family too?"

"Of course!" I said. "Everyone in my family is a relative of mine, just like everyone in your family is a relative of yourse."

"They're your aunts and uncles and cousins?"

"Yes," I said.

"But they're different people from *my* relatives?"

"Sure."

"So does that mean," Connie asked, poking my cheek with her finger, "that all families are alike, but they just have different people in them?"

I looked at Isabel and she looked back at me. Then she sighed and turned to Connie and said, "I guess what you mean is, the people in different families are different but the relationships are the same."

The corners of Connie's mouth drooped down a little, and her forehead had little wavy wrinkles in it. So I said, "Look, Connie. You're the daughter of *your* mother, and I'm the daughter of *my* mother. We're all different *people,*

but you and I are both *daughters.*''

''See,'' Isabel added, ''Pixie has a mother-daughter relationship in *her* family, and we have a mother-daughter relationship in *our* family.''

Connie didn't smile. She would look first at Isabel, and then at me. She looked at us real hard, as if she was searching our faces to find out what we meant.

Then Isabel laughed and said, ''Don't you see, Connie, we're members of *our* family and Pixie's a member of *hers.*''

Nobody said anything for a moment. Then Connie asked, ''If the whole family will be at the Thanksgiving dinner, will the members be there too?''

CHAPTER FOUR

The next morning, my mother was making a second helping of pancakes, and she had her back turned to us. I had a forkful of pancake halfway to my mouth, and I just stopped and watched Miranda eat.

At first, Miranda tried not to pay any attention to me. But then she yelled out, "Ma, she's looking at me again! Make her stop looking at me!"

Without turning around, my mother said, "Stop annoying your sister, Pixie." I just kept on looking. I figured I really wasn't *doing* anything — just looking.

Then Miranda kicked me. She kicked my shin, just under the knee. It didn't really hurt, but I screamed and cried and carried on anyhow. My mother turned around and yelled at Miranda. That made me feel better, but I kept on hollering just the same.

"She's always trying to bug me, ma," Miranda said.

I was sitting on the floor, holding my shin, and my mother sat down facing me and took my hands and said, "Why, Pixie? Just tell me why."

I sniffled. "Why what?"

"Why don't you get along with your sister?"

"Why don't you ask her why she doesn't get along with me?"

"Is it something she did to you?"

Somehow, when my mother asked me that question, I seemed to remember something that I'd forgotten for a long, long time.

I practically shouted, "She sure did!" I pointed my finger at my sister, and she looked at me as if she had no idea what I was so mad about.

"Last year," I said, "you remember when Mrs. Woods, next door, gave that party for Ellen? Well, she told Miranda to invite me, and Miranda was so mean, she didn't even *tell* me. I didn't find out about it until the next day. When I did finally hear about it, I went into the closet in your room, and pulled the door shut, and stayed there on the closet floor, among the shoes, for about two hours. I cried all over your shoes."

Miranda looked shocked. My mother said, "Is that what happened, Miranda?"

Miranda said, "No! Ellen wrote both of us invitations. She meant to bring them both over and give them to us. But she happened to meet me in the street the day before the party, so she gave me mine. We talked for a long time, and she forgot what she started out to do, and went

back home without having brought Pixie her invitation. She didn't discover her mistake until two nights later, and then she was ashamed to tell Pixie what had happened, so she just said nothing."

My mother looked at me, and all she said was, "See, Pixie."

I didn't say anything. I didn't want to think it might have just been an accident. It was much simpler when I thought Miranda was to blame.

My mother said, "She's your sister, Pixie." Then she added, "And you're hers."

I grumbled, "I don't *want* to be her sister. I'd rather have Isabel as a sister."

Miranda said quickly, "We've *got* to be sisters, because we have the same parents. Gee, you sure need to study family relationships some."

I sat there for a while with my chin in my hand and my lower lip stuck out. Finally I said, "What difference does it make? If you can't see or touch something, it can't be real. And everybody knows you can't see or touch relationships. That means they can't be real."

"Momma," Miranda yelled, "listen to what Pixie's saying! She says people can't see relationships! But anybody can see I'm taller than her, and 'being taller than' is a relationship. And anybody can see I'm standing close to you, and isn't 'close to' a relationship?"

I stood up and said, "People are real, and things are

real, but relationships are just in our minds.''

''Why are you so sure of that, Pixie?'' my mother asked.

''Because no one can look at me and tell whether or not I'm anyone's cousin, or whether or not I'm anyone's niece, the way they can just look at me and see that I'm short and skinny.''

My mother said, ''I'm not so sure family relationships can't be seen. You know how I always tell you, 'You're your father's daughter; you have his mouth.'''

''Yes,'' I answered, ''and Daddy says I have your eyes. But how about Miranda? Daddy says Miranda has *his* eyes and *your* mouth. How can that be?''

''We don't all have to look alike in order to belong to the same family,'' my mother answered.

Miranda wrinkled her nose and said, ''Momma, is Pixie right when she says that something can't be real if it can't be seen or touched?''

''I guess it depends on what we mean by 'real','' my mother said.

''Momma,'' I said, ''why can't you just tell us who's right and who's wrong?''

My mother answered in a funny sort of voice, like she was wondering out loud, ''Must it be that one of you is right and the other wrong?''

I'm still trying to figure out what she meant by that.

* * *

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I know. You want me to get back to my story about the zoo trip. The story the zoo trip made me think of.

But that's what I call my "mystery story." I can't tell you about it right now. Maybe I'll never tell it to you.

Do you think you can guess what my "mystery story" will be about? I say you'll never guess.

And even if you guessed, I wouldn't tell you if you were right. So there!

Later on, maybe I'll tell you my *reason* for not telling you my mystery story, if it turns out that I don't tell you my story.

But now let me get back to the story of how I made up my mystery story.

* * *

Oh, there's something I forgot to mention. When Miranda kicked me because she said I kept looking at her, and my mother yelled at her, my mother said, "Miranda, that's no excuse!"

So I said, "Momma, it *is* an excuse, but it's *only* an excuse!"

"Pixie," my mother said, "it seems to me that if you have an excuse for doing something, then you have a *good reason* for doing it."

"But momma," I told her, "if I hurt my finger a little bit in school, and I told the teacher I was hurt and needed

to be sent home, everybody would know that I was using my hurt finger as an excuse. An excuse isn't a *good* reason — it's a *bad* reason!''

Miranda said, ''Pixie, do you have to argue about everything?''

I said, ''I'm not arguing. I'm just asking questions. Is that such a crime?''

That's when Miranda said I was always trying to bug her. As if anybody would believe *that* excuse for kicking me!

* * *

I climbed up into my father's lap and took his glasses off and tried them on. I couldn't see a thing through them, so I put them back on his nose. He didn't say a word. He just looked at me over the tops of his glasses. And Miranda stood there with her hands on her hips and watched us.

''I hear you're going on a zoo trip,'' he said.

I said, ''Daddy, I've told you about it umpteen times! You've forgotten everything I told you.''

''No, I haven't,'' he said. ''You have to think of a mystery creature. And you have to make up a mystery story about what the zoo trip made you think of.''

I gave him a big hug. ''Daddy,'' I told him, ''you're wonderful. And now I guess you want me to tell you what

my mystery creature is.''

''No, not if it's a secret. And you won't be able to tell me your story until after you've visited the zoo.''

I gave him another hug and said, ''Poor Daddy!''

''Why, poor Daddy?'' he asked me.

''Because you think I have to wait until *after* the zoo trip happens in order to make up a story about what the zoo trip makes me think of.''

''Oh? And what *does* the zoo trip make you think of?''

''That's for me to know and for you to find out!'' I told him. ''But I'll tell you what — I'll give you a hint. It made me wonder about the difference between animals that think and animals that don't. And it made me wonder how thinking starts, or where it comes from.''

''Oh, is that all?'' Daddy said. ''Well! I'm sure it will be no problem at all for you to make up a story about *that!*''

I just laughed. I didn't tell him that I had my story all made up *already!*

That's when the cat ran across the room, I jumped off my father's lap and screamed at the cat and chased it all through the house. When I came back my father said, ''Pixie, why do you *scream* so much? You don't see *me* run around the house screaming all the time, do you?

I said, ''No. But *did* you when you were my age?''

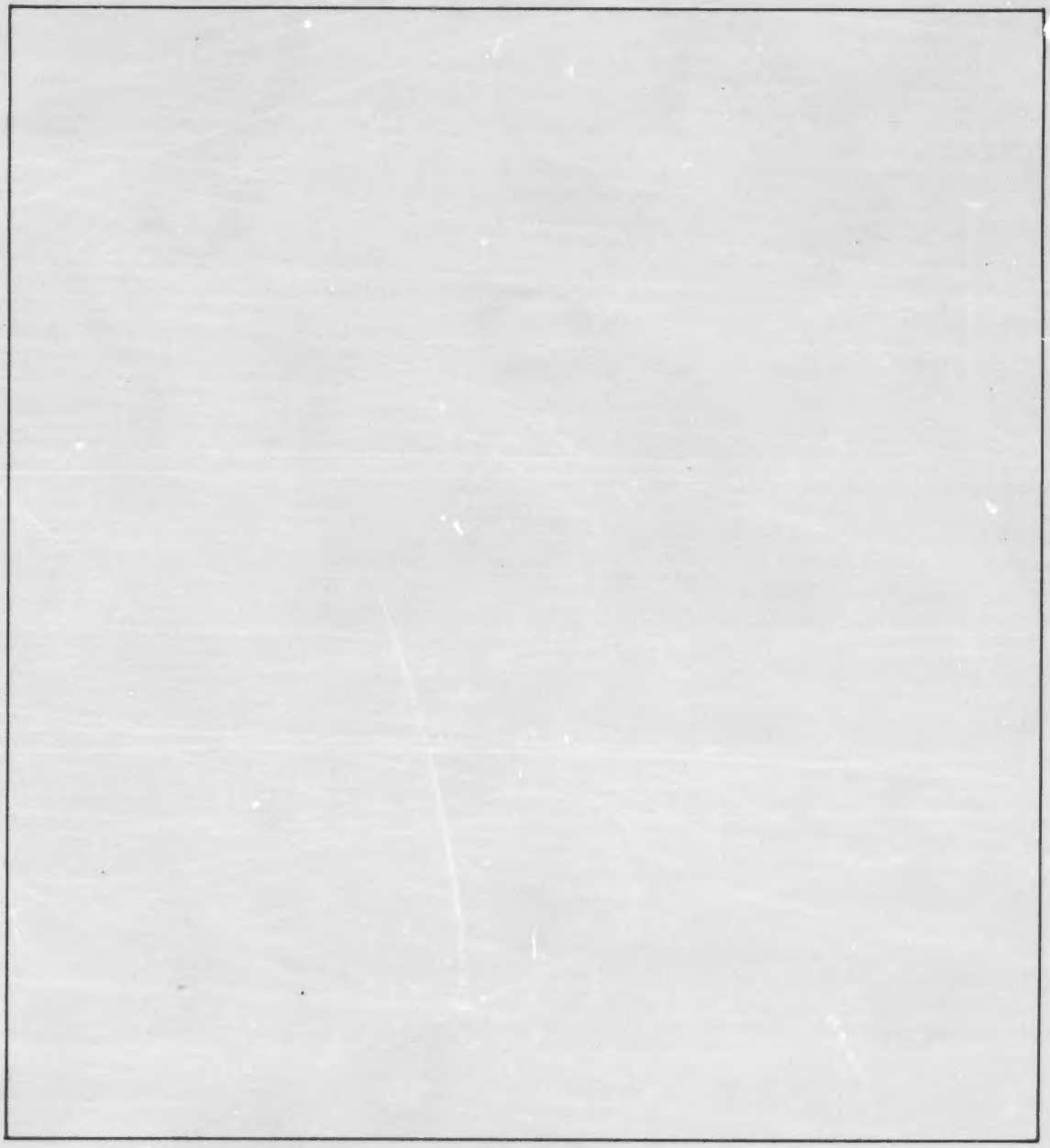
''I guess I did,'' he said. ''But that doesn't make it

right."

"I know," I answered. "Just because you once did it is no excuse for me to do it. But still — "

"But still, what?" my father asked.

"Maybe, if it wasn't wrong for you then, it isn't wrong for me now, that's all!" I said.



CHAPTER FIVE

After we got in bed and turned out the light, I said, "Miranda, where does the light go when you turn off the switch? We say it goes 'out,' but really, where does it go?"

Miranda said, "It goes to sleep, and that's what you better do."

"Miranda, I mean it," I insisted. "Where does it go?"

"It goes where the dark comes from," Miranda answered. "Now let me alone."

"You mean the dark comes from Outer Space, like the Blob, and Things like that?" There was no answer from Miranda, so I added, "You *know* I don't believe in all that stuff."

Miranda turned and looked at me in the dark. "First you don't believe in relationships. And now you don't believe in space. Is there anything you *do* believe in?"

"That's not fair," I told her. "Just because I wonder about something, right away you say I don't believe in it. You always try to take all the fun out of everything!" And with that I turned over and went to sleep. But not before I said to myself, "Space! It's just a *word!* It's just emptiness! People talk about it as if it were something, but it's really *nothing!*" Then I added, "Miranda can keep her ol' relationships and her ol' space, and I'll keep my mystery creature and my mystery story and all my other mysteries." I didn't know what *other* mysteries I might have, but I figured Miranda would never know the difference.

* * *

The next morning, I just lay in bed while Miranda was getting dressed. "You'd better hurry up and get your clothes on," she said. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing." I said. "I'm just thinking."

"You can think and get dressed at the same time," Miranda told me.

I made believe I didn't hear her. I said, "I'm thinking how, right at this minute, all over town, everybody's getting out of bed and putting their clothes on and having breakfast and getting ready to go to school. At this very minute, Isabel's probably brushing her teeth, and Willa Mae's eating a piece of toast and Brian's tying his shoelaces. And here I am, lying in bed thinking about them."

Miranda looked at me with a funny sort of smile and said, "So I'm close to you and they're far from you?"

"Uh-huh," I agreed.

"Well, 'close to' and 'far from' are *relationships*. And not only that, they're *space* relationships. What's more, it's later than you think, and 'later than' is a *time* relationship, and if you don't get up right now I'm going to tell Momma!"

"*Time!*" I yelled at her. "That's just like *space!* It's just a word!"

Miranda didn't yell back at me. She just said, "Look, Pixie, it's late and school's a long way off. When we talk about time, we mean earlier than and later than. When we talk about space, we mean near and far. Okay?"

It was as if a light went on in my head. "Oh!" I said, "*now* I see what you mean. *Now* I understand what makes space and time. Space is made up of space relationships and time is made up of time relationships. Isn't that what you're telling me?"

All Miranda would say was, "I don't know. Why don't you ask Mr. Mulligan? If you ever get to his class this morning, that is."

* *

"Mr. Mulligan," I said, "what's a relationship?"

First he said, "Hmmm." then he said, "I guess you'd

call it a connection. But maybe we'd better ask the others here what relationships are."

Isabel said, "There are family relationships. It's what connects people to other people in the same family. Like, if people are sisters, that's their relationship."

Rusty said, "Numbers have relationships. One number can be smaller than another. Or it could be larger. Or they could be the same size."

"There can't be two numbers of the same size," said Chita. "They'd be the same number."

"Words are connected with other words," said Jenny. "I mean, in sentences, subjects will take verbs, like 'Dogs bark'."

"And things have relationships," said Tommy. "There's the relationship of a wheel to a car, or a finger to a hand, or a door to a house."

By this time, Robert was jumping up and down. "I know! I know! Words and things have relationships. The word 'mountain' has a relationship to all the mountains there are. And the word 'China' has a relationship to the country, China."

Mr. Mulligan waited, but no one else said anything. So he said, "You did okay. Pixie, does that help you any?"

"They were good examples," I said. "But I still want to know what relationships are."

Mr. Mulligan ran his hand through his hair. "What

did I tell you I thought they were?'' he asked.

I looked at him with the saddest expression I could put on, and I said, ''Nobody tells me anything. I have to figure everything out for myself.''

* * *

It was like Brian didn't want to go home. That's what I thought at first. But then I could tell he was thinking about something. He just stared at me. Pretty soon there was nobody left in the classroom but him and me and Mr. Mulligan.

Then he went to the blackboard and wrote this:

mountain ⟶

''Oh, Brian,' I said, ''I think I see what you mean. It's like Robert said. There's the word 'mountain,' and then there's the mountain itself. And the arrow stands for the relationship between the word and the thing.''

Brian grinned. I couldn't remember ever having seen him grin before. Then he went back to the blackboard, picked up the piece of chalk again, and wrote,

Mountains are *far.*

Houses are *near.*

Far and *near* are space relationships.

I laughed and clapped my hands and said, ''I can do

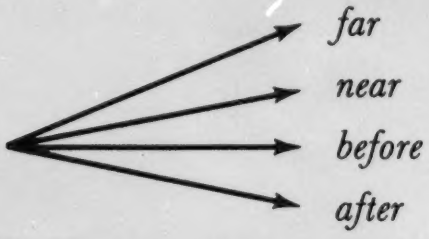
that too!'' So I wrote:

Today is *before* the zoo trip.

Next week will be *after* the zoo trip.

Before and *after* are time relationships.

Brian grinned again. I liked being able to amuse him. But then he must have had another idea, because he went back to the board and put this down:



''Brian,'' Mr. Mulligan asked, ''are you saying that the word ''relationships'' has a relationship to far and near and before and after, the way the word 'mountain' has a relationship to real mountains?''

Brian nodded.

Then I asked, ''Mr. Mulligan, the word 'mountain ' and the idea 'mountain' are in our minds, right? And the real mountains are in the world?''

He said, ''That's one way of putting it.''

''And the word 'relationship' and the idea 'relationship' are in our minds, and real relationships are in the world?''

''I guess you could say that too,'' he told me.

''And do relationships like *before* and *after* make up time?''

"In a way," said Mr. Mulligan.

I was beginning to see what I wanted to get at, and I wouldn't give up. So I said, "And do relationships like *far* and *near* make up space?"

He shook his head, to mean yes. Brian stared at me.

"Well," I said, "isn't it possible that, in the same way that space and time are made up of relationships, so our minds are made up of the words and ideas that *stand for* those relationships?"

"That's a very nice analogy, Pixie," said Mr. Mulligan.

"I don't understand," I answered. "What's an analogy?"

He looked at his watch. "Oh, my goodness," he said. "Three-forty-five! The staff meeting began fifteen minutes ago! Pixie, I'll have to explain to you about analogy some other time!" And with that he rushed off. A moment later he rushed back into the room, grabbed a bunch of papers from his desk and rushed out again. As he passed us, I heard him mutter to himself, "Space and time are dimensions. But could the mind—"

* * *

CHAPTER SIX

I want to tell you about what happened Tuesday night. I remember I had trouble getting to sleep. And I remember asking myself questions, like "What day is five days from today?" and "What day was it three days ago?" and "What day would it be two days before six days from now?"

Also I remember that I was thinking, just before I went to sleep, "If today's Tuesday, then tomorrow must be Wednesday. And if tomorrow's Wednesday, then tomorrow must be the zoo trip."

In the middle of the night, I woke up. I just sat up in bed, my eyes wide open. It wasn't that I was scared of

anything, like I sometimes am, at night. It's just that it suddenly hit me: Wednesday! The zoo trip! It's today!

I looked at the clock on the dresser. It has a dial that lights up. Four-thirty in the morning! But how could I go back to sleep on such a day? I decided I would get dressed.

Miranda was still asleep. At least I think she was asleep. I'm never sure. Lots of times, Miranda thinks I'm asleep and I'm not. So maybe she was just lying real still and pretending to be asleep. But I figured, if she *was* asleep, it wouldn't be a good idea to wake her up. So I didn't put on the light.

Did you ever try to get dressed in the dark? Let me tell you, it isn't easy. I mean, how do you know which color your socks are? But I guess I wasn't as wide awake as I thought, because I put on the first pair of socks I found in the drawer.

Then I started to look for my shoes, which I keep by my bed. I have two pairs, my new ones and my everyday ones. I keep them side by side.

First I put on my right shoe. It went on fine. Then I tried to put the other shoe on my left foot. But it didn't fit! I tried to force it, but it wouldn't go on.

Then suddenly, in a flash, I realized what had happened. I couldn't get my left shoe on my left foot because my left foot had turned into a right foot! It must have happen-

ed while I slept. But now I was stuck with two right feet! Who ever heard of a person with two right feet?

I said to myself, "How am I ever going to visit the zoo today, if I can get only one shoe on?" I could just see myself hopping around the zoo on one foot. Everyone would think I was a stork or something!

There wasn't anything else to do. I would have to go across the hall and wake up my mother and tell her.

My mother is a very sound sleeper. I whispered, "Momma, momma," and I tried shaking her shoulder a little, but still she didn't wake up. So I lifted up one of her eyelids, and I said, "Momma, are you in there?" But still she didn't wake up. So I went back to my room and sat down again on the edge of the bed.

At first I took my socks off, but then I put them back on, so I could try my shoes again. It was awfully dark in my room. I decided to try my left foot first. I was so surprised! This time, my shoe fit perfectly! I was so happy, I can't tell you how happy I was! My foot had come back to its regular shape!

Then I tried to put the other shoe on my right foot — and I thought I'd die! It wouldn't go on!

I threw the shoe down on the floor and ran into my mother's room. This time I didn't whisper. "Momma, momma," I yelled. "My feet keep changing! First they changed into two right feet! And now they've changed in-

to two left feet!''

My father woke up and put on the light. And my mother woke up and said I was having a nightmare. But my father explained to her how I must have gotten my shoes mixed up in the dark. He also explained to me that the zoo trip wasn't *this* Wednesday but *next* Wednesday.

Through it all, Miranda kept right on sleeping. Boy, can she sleep! But even while she's asleep, she manages to hog all the covers.

* * *

Neil brought his model helicopter to class so we could all see it. ''It's the kind the traffic reporters use,'' he explained. ''And every part is exactly like it is in a real helicopter.''

''Only smaller,'' said Tommy.

''Right,'' Neil replied, ''only smaller.''

Isabel said, ''The *parts* are the same and their *relationships* to one another are the same. That's why it's called a 'model.' ''

Geraldo scowled and said, ''Kids are smaller than grownups. Does that make them models? Their bodies have the same parts and the same relationships.''

That made Isabel laugh, and she answered, ''There may be model boats and model airplanes, but there are no model children!''

Tommy was making an airplane out of a piece of

paper, but he stopped and asked, "Can you have two things where the relationships are the same but the parts are different?"

Nobody answered. We all tried to think of something, but we weren't having any luck. Just then Brian, who was standing near the blackboard, happened to reach up and pull down the map of the United States.

"There's an example!" Chita said. "The parts aren't the same. The cities on the map are just dots—real cities are full of buildings. But the *relationships* are the same!"

"In what way?" Mr. Mulligan asked.

Chita couldn't answer. She just shrugged her shoulders. But Robert said, "I know! I know! The city Chicago is west of the city New York. And on the map, Chicago has the same relationship to New York—it's to the west!"

"It's to the *left*!" Rusty put in.

"Well, on a map, that *means* 'to the west,' " Robert answered.

"Mr. Mulligan," I said, "if you're comparing two things that have the same relationships but different parts, what's that called?"

"I suppose that would be an *analogy*," he told me. "Can anyone here give another example of an analogy?"

"Well," said Isabel, "how about this: a wing is related to a bird the way a fin is related to a fish?"

Jenny said, "Let me! Handles are related to cups the way doorknobs are related to doors."

"A bulb is to light," Geraldo said, "like fire is to heat."

Neil said to Geraldo, "I don't get it. What's the relationship?"

Geraldo answered, "The way a light bulb gives off light is like the way a fire gives off heat."

"They're not the same!" Neil argued.

Geraldo snapped back, "They don't *have* to be the *same*. They just have to be *like*."

"Is he right?" Neil asked Mr. Mulligan. "Doesn't an analogy have to be exact?"

"No," Mr. Mulligan answered. "Geraldo's right. The relationships you're comparing don't have to be exactly alike. They can just be similar."

"But they *could* be exactly alike, couldn't they?" Neil said.

That's when Robert broke in. "Sure," he said. "Suppose I said, 'Two is to four as four is to eight'. The two relationships would be exactly alike. It's one-half on either side."

I said to myself, "See, Pixie, from what you heard, now you know what an analogy is. If you never went to school, how would you find out what it was you were doing all along?"

* * *

At lunchtime the next day, Isabel and I met Chita and Geraldo coming out of the cafeteria. "What's for lunch?" we asked.

"Chow mein," said Chita.

"And for dessert?" I asked.

Geraldo said, "Ice cream pops."

Isabel and I stood in line. Then Brian came up and stood in line with us. I said, "Brian, I'll bet you just hate chow mein." I was only trying to make conversation. But all he did was shrug.

We took our trays to a corner table. Isabel and I started to eat as soon as we sat down, but Brian didn't. It was like he had to think for a minute before he ate.

During lunch, I told Isabel all about the talk that Brian and I had with Mr. Mulligan after school, and how we talked about relationships.

"My favorite relationships are comparisons," said Isabel. "Whenever you compare things, you're pointing out relationships."

Brian had his mouth full of chow mein. I said to Isabel, "I don't get you."

"I mean," she said, "if I say 'Chita runs faster than Jenny,' I'm talking about a relationship, because I'm comparing Chita and Jenny in terms of speed."

"Oh, I see," I said. "And if I say, 'The cafeteria is larger than my room at home,' I'm comparing the two

rooms in terms of size."

Brian fished around in his pocket and brought out a stub of pencil and a torn piece of paper. He chewed for a minute on the eraser, then wrote, "This morning was as long as the Amazon."

I scraped up the last of the chow mein on my plate and said, "Brian, you don't seem to understand. You can't compare the morning to a river: they're two different things. One's time and the other — the other's space."

"But they *are* both long," said Isabel, after a moment's pause.

"Sure!" I said. "But in different ways."

When we got back to the classroom, we told Mr. Mulligan about our conversation in the cafeteria.

"Let me see if I can help," said Mr. Mulligan. "When we compared Neil's helicopter with a regular helicopter, what did we say?"

"We called Neil's helicopter a *model*," said Isabel, "because the parts of both helicopters were the same, and had the same relationships."

"All right," said Mr. Mulligan. "And what did we say about the map of the United States?".

I answered, "It just had the same relationships as the United States itself, so we called it an *analogy*."

"But you told us there were exact relationships," said Isabel. "Like if I say, there are two boys in the class for

every three girls, what's that called?''

''That's called a *ratio*,'' said Mr. Mulligan. ''What you said would be a ratio of 2 to 3. And we can use ratios in analogies. For instance, we could say 2 is to 3 as 4 is to 6.''

Isabel whispered to me, ''See, with analogies you say 'as'.''

I whispered back to her ''Naah, that's not it. It's just that, 'like' is a kid's word and 'as' is a grownup's word.''

I turned back to Mr. Mulligan and said, ''Mr. Mulligan, what happens when you say that two things are alike, and yet you know that they're two different things that are alike only in some eentsy way?''

''Well,'' he answered, ''that's what Brian was doing when he wrote the sentence, 'This morning was as long as the Amazon'. Brian meant that the morning and the Amazon were similar with regard to being long.''

''So what's something like that called?'' Isabel asked.

''A *simile*,'' said Mr. Mulligan. ''And it would still be called a simile if he had just written, 'the morning *was like the* Amazon.' ''

''But suppose,'' I said, ''suppose someone takes two different things, and says that one of them *is* the other. Like, suppose I said, 'Jimmy *is* a pig.' Not just 'Jimmy eats like a pig,'' because I know that would be a simile. But 'Jimmy *is* a pig.' What would *that* be.''

''That's what we call a *metaphor*,'' said Mr. Mulligan.

Brian went to the blackboard and wrote, "Models, analogies, ratios, similes and metaphors. That's enough for today!"

Isabel looked at me and said, "It's not just enough—it's too much! And Brian's too much, too!"

Brian overheard Isabel and turned back to the blackboard. I wasn't sure, but I thought I heard him laugh.

* * *

Just before supper, I said I'd like to stay up late, and I was told I couldn't. So I had a tantrum.

After the tantrum, I sulked. I sat down at the table with my cheeks puffed out, and I wouldn't talk to anyone. I wouldn't take any food either, just to make everyone suffer.

Miranda said, "Kids all over the world are going hungry, and you turn your nose up at baked macaroni and cheese! You don't know how lucky you are, and that's a fact!"

So what if it's a fact? Just because something's true, is that any reason I have to listen to it?

Then my father tried to change the subject. He said, "How did school go today, Pixie?"

That made me feel better, because I'd had such a good day in school. I sort of mumbled, "I learned all about models."

Daddy tried to make a joke: "You mean the people who have their photographs taken for magazine covers?"

"Oh, daddy," I said, "not that kind of model. I mean, like, airplane models and monster models. We also learned about metaphors and analogies and similes."

He said, "Oh, *did* you now? How *about* that! Tell me what all those big words mean."

"Well," I told him, "when we say something *is* something else, that's an *analogy*. When we say something is *like* something else, it's a *metaphor*. And when we compare the relationships in one thing to the relationships in something else, that's a *simile*."

Did you ever have the feeling, while you were talking, that what you were saying was all wrong? That's how I felt while I was explaining to Daddy what I had learned. He didn't say anything; he just sort of choked a little on his macaroni. And Momma got up to get some salad out of the refrigerator.

But Miranda gave me a real hard time, and I had to argue with her all through supper. When you know you're wrong, arguing with someone is sure no fun. And it's doubly, doubly bad when the other person uses *your own ideas* to prove to you that you don't know what you're talking about!

To top it all off, she said to me, "Pixie, you're such a little goose!" She had some nerve, saying that, after *I* told *her* about metaphors!

CHAPTER SEVEN

On Saturday afternoon, my father and mother had to go visit my father's boss, who was in the hospital. They said they didn't want to take Miranda and me with them, and we said, "Fine, we'll stay home! We didn't want to go anyhow!"

As they were leaving, my mother said, "Remember, now, you'll be here alone, and I don't want you to let anyone in. That's a rule you mustn't break!"

They said they would be back in two or three hours. Daddy patted me on the head, and they were gone.

I did a little dance around the kitchen table, and Miranda said, "What's with you?"

"We're free!" I yelled. "The house belongs to us!"

"You're crazy," said Miranda. "Nothing's changed. You know perfectly well that there are family rules, and they stay the same whether Mom and Dad are here or not."

"Free, free, free," I sang. "Free, free, free! Everything's possible!"

Miranda wrinkled up her nose, like she always does, and said, "You're disgusting!"

I said, "I'm going right to Momma's closet and put on her good dress that comes down to the floor."

"It'll swallow you," said Miranda. "But maybe that's good!"

Just then there was a knock at the door. I didn't take off the chain; I just called out, "Who's there?" and I heard Isabel say, "It's Isabel — and Connie."

Miranda said, "Pixie, you heard what Momma said. We're not supposed to let *anyone* in. Rules are rules!"

"But Momma didn't mean we should keep out people we *know*!" I insisted.

Miranda said, "There are lots of kooks we know that Momma wouldn't want us to let in."

Just then Isabel called from the other side of the door, "Pixie, don't worry about us. We just stopped by to say hello. See you tomorrow!"

I didn't want a big argument with Miranda. So I went up in Momma's closet, and sat down on the floor, among the shoes, and thought about my mystery creature and my mystery story. I grumbled to myself, "Can you imagine, this is the only place I can be free to be me!"

* * *

Somehow I managed to last through Sunday and Monday and Tuesday. At last Wednesday came around — the real Wednesday, the right Wednesday, the honest-to-goodness, day-of-the-zoo-trip Wednesday!

Everybody kept trying to guess everyone else's mystery creature. Isabel and I were standing right behind where Brian was sitting. He didn't know we were there. He opened his book, peeked inside, and quick closed it again. But I caught sight of a card he had in the book, a card with a picture of an animal on it. It was a picture of a giraffe.

I took Isabel by the arm and we moved away. I whispered to Isabel, "That must be Brian's mystery creature. Why in the world would anyone be interested in an ugly, old, long-necked giraffe?"

"Pixie," said Isabel, "forget it. It's none of our business."

Just then Neil — the one who always teases me — called across the room, "Hey, Pixie, I know *your* mystery creature: it's a mamm—"

I screamed at the top of my lungs, and he stopped short, and looked very shocked. Mr. Mulligan was very angry. "What's going on here?" he wanted to know.

I was all choked up. All I could say was, "He—he said."

Neil said, "I was just trying to tease her a little, Mr. Mulligan, honest. I was going to tell everyone that Pixie's mystery creature was a mammoth, because everyone knows that there aren't any more mammoths — they're extinct!"

I can't tell you how much better I felt when Neil explained about the mammoth. And right now I can't tell you *why* I felt better. I said to Isabel, "It seemed like a big joke to find out Brian's mystery creature, but it wasn't a joke at all when I thought Neil had found out mine."

* * *

"Mr. Mulligan," Rusty asked, "this afternoon, at the zoo, can we all go where we please, or do we all have to stay together?"

"I'm glad you asked, Rusty, because that's one rule I'm going to have to insist on. We have to stay together." Mr. Mulligan frowned as he said it. That was his way of letting us know he meant what he said.

"Is that a zoo rule," Kate asked, "or is it a school rule?"

Mr. Mulligan said, "It's a school rule." Then he added, "The zoo has its own rules, which you'll see if you read the signs."

"Yeah," said Jenny, "like 'Don't touch the bars of the leopard cage,' and 'Don't feed the polar bears.' "

"Mr. Mulligan," said Robert, "we're not babies. We can take care of ourselves. Why do we have to have rules for everything?"

"It's not a matter of how old you are, Robert," said Mr. Mulligan. "There are rules for grown-ups as well as for children. Take the rules of grammar. They apply to

everyone. Like, a plural subject takes a plural verb. I can't properly say, 'The dogs *is* sitting on the lawn.' I have to say, 'The dogs *are* sitting on the lawn,' because I have to follow the rules of grammar."

"It's the same if you were playing a game, Robert," Jenny said. "There's no such thing as a game without rules."

"Every subject we study has rules," said Geraldo.

"Like what?" Tommy wanted to know.

Mr. Mulligan went to the board and wrote the headings for five columns: "Social Studies; Science; Language Arts; Health and Safety; Arithmetic." Then he said, "All right, who can give me examples of rules in each of these areas?"

Isabel said, "It's a rule in geography that a map has to be made exactly like the place it's a map of."

"In arithmetic," said Rusty, "it's a rule that, when equals are added to equals, the results are equal."

"In health and safety," said Chita, "it's a rule that a person who's been drowning should be given artificial perspiration."

"Respiration," said Mr. Mulligan.

"Artificial respiration," Chita said.

"In science, we learn that people shouldn't dump poisons into their lakes and rivers," said Tommy. "That's a rule."

"And in writing," said Jenny, "we learn that questions have to be followed by question marks and exclamations have to be followed by exclamation marks."

"That was very good," Mr. Mulligan said.

"Wait a minute," I said, "I'm not sure about what Rusty said."

"What's wrong with what I said?" asked Rusty. "It's true, isn't it?"

"Sure it's true," I told him. "But is it a rule? Like, when we get a game, we first look at the rules, because the rules will tell us how to play the game. So rules tell us how to act. But what you said just tells us how *numbers* act; it doesn't tell *us* what to do."

Mr. Mulligan said, "I think Pixie's right, Rusty. What you gave us was really not a rule, but a principle of arithmetic."

Chita raised her hand. "Mr. Mulligan, what do you have in spelling — rules or principles?"

"That's not an easy question to answer," said Mr. Mulligan. "Speaking of spelling, would you please turn in your spelling homework?"

I heard Chita whisper to Robert, "Boy, did I stump *him*!"

"Aw," Robert said, "I'll bet he knows the answer, but he just didn't want to tell us."

I wasn't sure whether to agree with Chita or Robert.

But then, no sooner than we had finished our spelling, it was time to take the bus to the zoo.

* * *

The bus ride was very bumpy, especially way in the back, where Isabel and I were sitting — or bouncing. Mr. Mulligan sat by himself up in front.

The trip to the zoo took a long time. Tommy and Neil kept cutting up, but after a while, even they got tired.

Then Chita called out, "Mr. Mulligan, I'm worried about the story we're supposed to make up. How can we make up a good story if we haven't had any practice?"

Mr. Mulligan turned so that he could see all of us, and said, "You're right, Chita. And since we have nothing to do right now, why don't we take the time to make up some stories and tell them to one another?"

Most of us sort of groaned, especially Tommy and Neil, who were stretched out on seats near the back of the bus. Chita said, "Mr. Mulligan, we wouldn't know where to begin."

"Suppose I asked you," he said, "to make up the most unbelievable story you could think of. Could you do it then?"

Robert said, "No, I still wouldn't know how to make up a story like that."

Mr. Mulligan stared out the window at a passing tractor trailer. "I'll tell you what," he said, after a moment,

"I'll give you a problem, and let's see who can think up the solution."

"What's the problem?" Willa Mae asked.

"Okay," said Mr. Mulligan. "I want you to imagine that we have a visitor with us, right here on the bus. I want you to imagine that he's a man, and that he's sitting right here next to me."

This seemed fun. I giggled a little and asked, "Is there anything special about him?"

"Yes," said Mr. Mulligan. "He was just created a moment ago. He just appeared here out of nowhere."

"What's his name?" Geraldo called out.

"Adam," Mr. Mulligan answered.

"Does he know language?" asked Robert. "Can he speak?"

"Yes, he knows words and their meanings, and he can speak. But remember, he has no memories, because he just started to live a minute ago."

Mr. Mulligan then turned to the empty seat alongside him and said, "Adam, this is our class. Say hello to Adam, class!"

We all yelled, at the tops of our lungs, "Good morning, Adam!"

"Now, Adam," Mr. Mulligan went on, "what you see in front of you are students. Class, if I were to ask Adam what students do, what would he say?"

"He'd say that we study," said Isabel. "He could figure that out just from the word 'student'."

"Ha!" Neil laughed. "He doesn't know *us*!"

"All right, now," said Mr. Mulligan. "Let's get to the important question. Suppose Adam were to point to you, and ask me, 'Where did they come from?' And suppose I wanted to tease him by making up the most unbelievable story I could think of. What would I say?"

We thought and thought. Finally, Robert put up his hand and said, "I know. You could tell him that we were once as tall as mountains, but we've been shrinking a bit every day, until now we're the size we are."

We all laughed, and agreed that Robert's story was completely unbelievable.

But then I raised my hand and said, "Mr. Mulligan, I have a different story you could tell Adam. You could tell him that we were once really, really tiny — just little specks. But every day we've grown some, until now we're the size we are!"

"But Pixie," Tommy protested, "we're supposed to make up *unbelievable* stories, and that story's *true*!"

I said to him, "Tommy, it doesn't *matter* whether it's true or not. What's true can be just as hard to believe as what's made up. And I can prove it!"

"How?" Tommy asked.

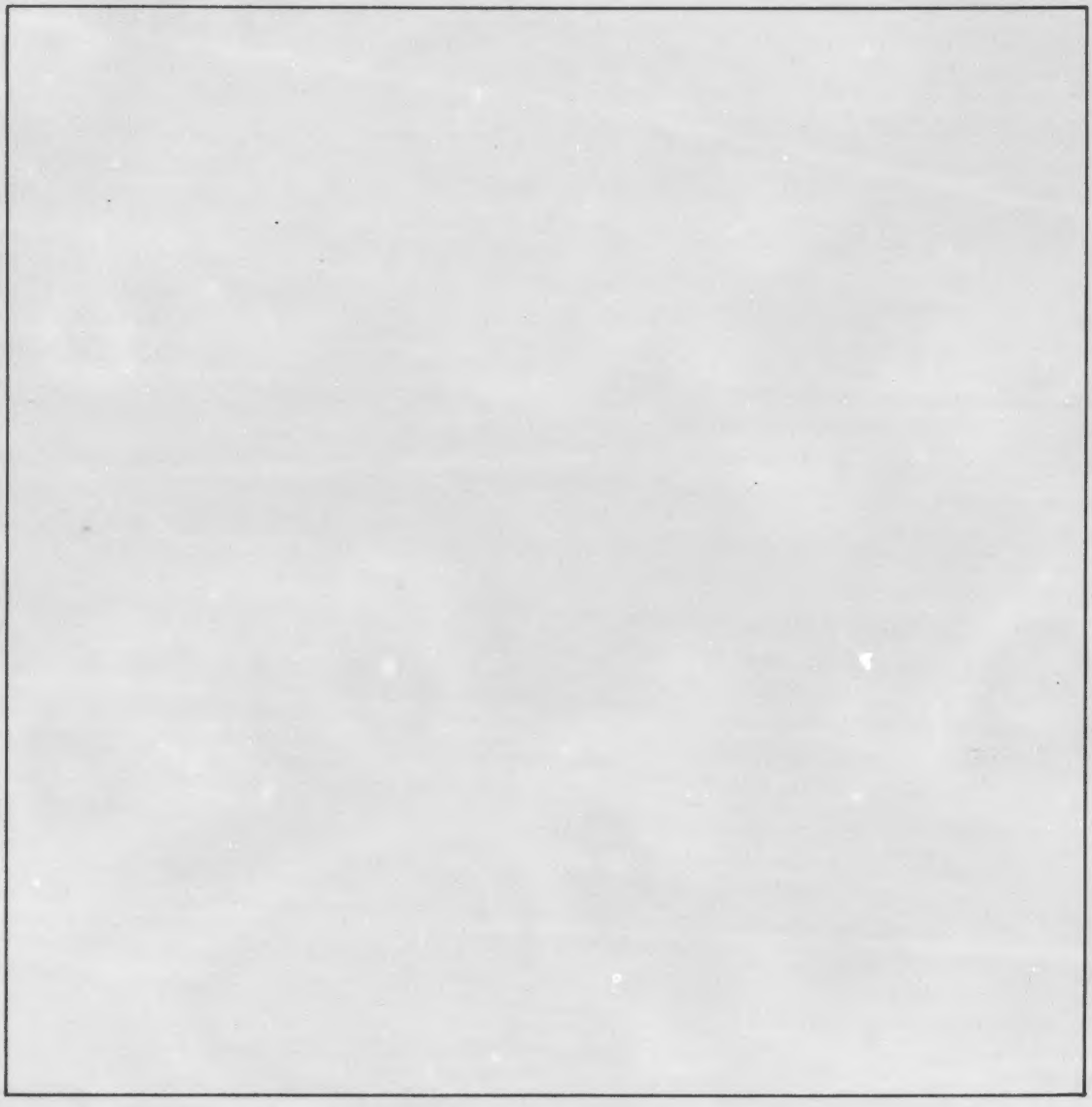
"By asking Adam. Adam, whose story do you believe,

Robert's or mine?''

There was silence in the bus. Finally, Chita called out, ''What does Adam say, Mr. Mulligan?''

Mr. Mulligan answered, ''He says Pixie's right, Chita. He says that the one story is as unbelievable as the other.''

Just then the bus pulled in to the gates of the zoo.



CHAPTER EIGHT

When we got to the zoo, Mr. Mulligan said we would first visit the birds. We went into this huge tent — it was like a big net strung up on poles — and there were all sorts of nice-looking birds there, with lots of pretty colors. But I wasn't really, *really* interested, because I knew that I wouldn't find what I came to see as long as I stayed in the bird house.

But some of the other members of the class found what they came for, because I could see Jenny wasn't able to tear herself away from a big old parrot. And there was Tommy, looking at a bunch of flamingos, and they were all standing on one leg, and he was standing on one leg too.

Then it was time for lunch, so we went into another tent where there were tables, and we got out our sandwiches. Some of us gobbled our food down right away. Nikki fed about half of hers to some squirrels that came around and begged.

Those who were finished early were restless and wanted to get started again, but Mr. Mulligan said, "You can walk around, if you want, but don't get out of sight.

Remember, we've all got to stay together."

Isabel and I saw Brian walk down one of the paths, so we started to follow him, hiding so that he wouldn't see us. Then he came to a small, fenced-in area, and he stood right up against the fence, pushing his face up against the wire.

At first, we couldn't see what he was looking at. But then we saw what it was: it was a baby giraffe. Its knees were very knobbly, and its eyes seemed to be a little crossed, and it walked in a sort of wobbly way.

The giraffe came closer and closer to Brian. He reached out his arms to it, but it didn't get frightened. It came closer and closer, until it was right in front of him.

Then the giraffe reached over to him and kind of nuzzled him, right on the forehead. Its nose was wet, and it left a wet spot on Brian's forehead. Then it stepped back, still looking at Brian.

And do you know what Brian did? We heard him! He *talked* to the giraffe!

Very slowly, he said, "You are—so—beautiful!"

At that, the little giraffe galloped away. And Brian turned, still without seeing us, and went back to the group.

Can you imagine, all those years of not saying anything, and when he finally does talk, he talks to a giraffe! To a *giraffe!*

I can't tell you how many times I tried to get him to talk to me, and he wouldn't. And then he tells a stupid ol' giraffe that it's beautiful!

By now the class was getting ready to start on the next part of the zoo visit. I wanted to see whether Brian would answer me with a nod of his head, or with words. I said, "Brian, have you found your mystery creature yet?"

He said, "Yes," just like it wasn't anything special for him to be talking again.

"Brian!" I practically shouted at him, "you're talking!"

He shook his head up and down, but he wasn't looking at me — he was looking at a panda we were passing.

That made me a little annoyed, so I said, "Brian, whatever made you *stop* talking?"

"I never stopped talking to animals," he said.

"Oh!" I said. "Then it was people you couldn't talk to! Why was that?"

"The more they talked, the less I talked," Brian replied. "The louder they yelled, the quieter I got."

"So after a while you didn't want to talk at all?"

"Right. Besides, no matter what I said, it made no difference."

"But you're talking now. So you think it makes a difference now, is that it?"

All Brian said was "Maybe," and he went off to look at some zebras.

It made me feel good to know that Brian was talking again. It also made me feel good that *I* was the one he started to talk to. I mean, I was the first one after the giraffe.

Of course, *I* never *stop* talking, so I never have to decide whether or not to start.

* * *

I told myself, "Pixie, you still haven't found your mystery creature. You'd better pay close attention to the signs, or you're going to miss it altogether!"

Then suddenly I said to myself, "All you know is the *name!* You really don't know what it *looks* like. How would you recognize it if you saw it?"

That's when I realized how silly I'd been. I should have looked up my mystery creature in an encyclopedia or in a Book of Animals.

There was nothing left for me to do but to read each and every sign in the zoo. We went from building to building, from cage to cage. And then there were the big outdoor exhibits. Each time, I'd rush around, looking for the sign which would tell me whether or not this was my mystery creature.

After a while, I began to realize that everyone in the class — everyone but me — had found what they had come for.

Mr. Mulligan even asked us if we'd found our mystery creatures, and I had to admit in front of everyone that I still hadn't found mine. What's more, it was getting towards the middle of the afternoon. Before long, Mr. Mulligan would tell us it was time to go home.

What if we had to leave, and I still hadn't found my mystery creature?

I said to myself, "I must have missed it somewhere! I've got to stay here until I find it, even if I have to go through the whole zoo again by myself!"

With that, I slipped away from the rest of the class. I figured I could meet everyone back at the bus.

The first thing I did was to ask a guard about the creature I was looking for. And do you know what he did? He pointed to a gorilla and said, "There's one!" I was just so *disgusted*! Here was this man, a guard at the zoo, and he couldn't tell the difference between my mystery creature and a gorilla!

I told myself, "Pixie, there's no sense in asking people. Not even the zoo guards know! You might as well give up; you'll never find it." That's when I sat down on a bench and started to cry. I knew I could never, *never* go back and admit to the class that my mystery creature wasn't in the zoo!

And that's where Mr. Mulligan and the class found me, sitting on the bench with my knees drawn up cover-

ing my face so people couldn't see me crying. Mr. Mulligan took us over to a place where there was grass and shade, and we all sat down in a circle.

Mr. Mulligan said, "Pixie, I thought we agreed to a rule that we would all stick together. How did you happen to go off by yourself?"

I just sniffled and didn't say anything.

"Were you able to find your mystery creature?" he asked.

I shook my head and started crying real hard again.

"Could you tell me its name?" Mr. Mulligan asked.

I swallowed and tried to stop crying, but I couldn't. I didn't give him an answer. Then he said, "Could you tell me anything about it — how you thought you'd recognize it if you saw it?"

By this time I was beginning to feel a little better. I managed to say — between sniffles, "All I know is that the mothers nurse their young, and that they're warm-blooded, and their bones are on the insides of their body, and they're born alive."

Mr. Mulligan leaned over and whispered to me, "Was your mystery creature a mammal?"

"That's it!" I practically shouted. "You guessed it! There *is* such a thing! A mammal!"

There was a buzz from some of the members of the class, but Mr. Mulligan motioned to them and they

quieted down. Then he turned back to me and said, "There were lots of mammals here today, Pixie. You just didn't know that that's what they were. In fact, some of them even paid admission to get in!"

He wasn't making any sense to me, so I just didn't say anything. Then he said to the class, "Is there anyone here who can help Pixie with her problem?"

I was brushing the tears from my eyes and couldn't see, but I could hear someone with a low voice say, "Maybe I can, Mr. Mulligan." It was Isabel.

"Pixie," said Isabel, "remember when you visited us in our apartment and we talked about the family?"

I shook my head up and down once, meaning yes.

"Well," said Isabel, "a family is made up of relatives, right? I mean, it's made up of fathers and mothers and children, right?"

I rubbed my nose with the back of my hand and said, "Okay, so?"

Isabel seemed to be having a hard time finding the right words. I could tell she wasn't too sure of herself. Finally she said, "We agreed that if there were no relatives, there wouldn't be anything we could call a 'family.' And it's the same with the word 'mammal'."

"Oh, I get it!" I said. "You mean there's a bunch of animals that are all relatives of one another. But we don't say they belong to the same family; we say they belong to the same mammal."

Mr. Mulligan closed his eyes, like maybe he didn't feel well. Then he opened them and said, "No, Pixie, no! The word 'mammal' isn't a family word, it's a *class* word!"

We could tell that Mr. Mulligan was a little upset, so no one said anything at first. Then Neil said, "What's *that* mean?"

"I know!" said Willa Mae. "We're all students here, so we make up a class. But we're not relatives of one another. It's just that there's a way in which we're all the same — we're all students."

"That's right," said Geraldo. "All the people in the world who are red-headed make up the class of red-headed people."

I said, "I still don't get it."

Then Chita said, "Pixie, don't you see? We're all students who form a class. But the class we form isn't itself a student."

"And," Kate added, "the class of red-headed people isn't itself red-headed."

"So," I said, "the word 'mammal' is the name of a class —"

"— the class of creatures that nurse their young," Robert said.

"Okay," I agreed, "but the class of mammals isn't itself a mammal." Then I got mad and yelled, "So *are* there mammals or *aren't* there?"

At that point, everybody had to start all over and explain everything to me for the second time. Pretty soon I was sick and tired of hearing how the class of ducks couldn't swim and how the class of robins couldn't fly, and how the class of mammals couldn't nurse its young.

I kept on arguing until Brian said, "Pixie, *all* the mammals in the zoo were your mystery creature. You had more than any of us."

But all I could think was that my mystery creature turned out to be practically nothing at all — just the name of a class, and not something warm and furry, with a wet nose and soft brown eyes.

Isabel said to me, "Don't worry, Pixie. There's still the mystery story that we each have to make up. And I'll bet you make up the best story in the class!"

That was nice of Isabel, because I started to think about my story. And I said to myself, "I messed up so bad on my mystery creature, I've just *got* to make this story the best ever! I want to make it a story they'll never forget! But how?" And with that, I began to think about how I could change my story to make it better.

* * *

After supper that evening, I figured I would tell my mother what I'd learned about mammals, and about how families were different from classes. But I hadn't counted on our cat. It got me confused all over again.

Our cat, Mischief, has three kittens — Midnight, Milky and Mixup. When it wants them to come, it sort of purrs and growls at the same time, and they come running.

I make the same kind of noise when I want to get into my mother's lap. She says I'm getting too big, but I'm not. I'm just about the smallest one in my class, and they all sit in their mothers' laps — *all* of them!

I said, "Momma, we learned that you can tell a mammal by the way it feeds its young. Mammals nurse their young. Birds give them worms."

"That's right," she told me. "Mischief is a mammal, because she nurses her kittens."

"And Mischief is a female, and so is Mixup, but Milky and Midnight are males."

"Right."

"Does that mean, Momma, that Milky and Midnight aren't mammals?"

"Why not, Pixie?"

"Because males don't nurse their young."

"Oh, Pixie!" Momma said, and she gave me a hug. "They're males and females of the same *kind!*"

But I just didn't understand, and I started to cry, because I thought I would *never* understand, and it's hard when you think you're *never* going to understand something. I cried all over my mother's neck, and she got out her handkerchief and wiped my nose.

"Momma," I said. "How come my tears are hot but my nose runs cold?"

"Pixie," my mother said, "how come we have two faucets in the kitchen sink, one for hot water and one for cold water?"

I grumbled, "I asked you a question and you answered me with a question."

My mother didn't say anything. She just rocked.

Then I said, "Momma, how come — how come the word 'mammal' sounds so much like the word 'momma'?"

"Because both words come from the fact that female mammals nurse their young."

"Momma," I said, "I told Isabel today that the word 'momma' was spelled m-o-m-m-a, and she said no it wasn't, it was spelled m-a-m-a. Is she right, or am I?"

"You're both right. It can be spelled either way."

"And she says she calls her father 'poppa,' spelled p-o-p-p-a, but I said it was spelled p-a-p-a. Could that be spelled both ways too?"

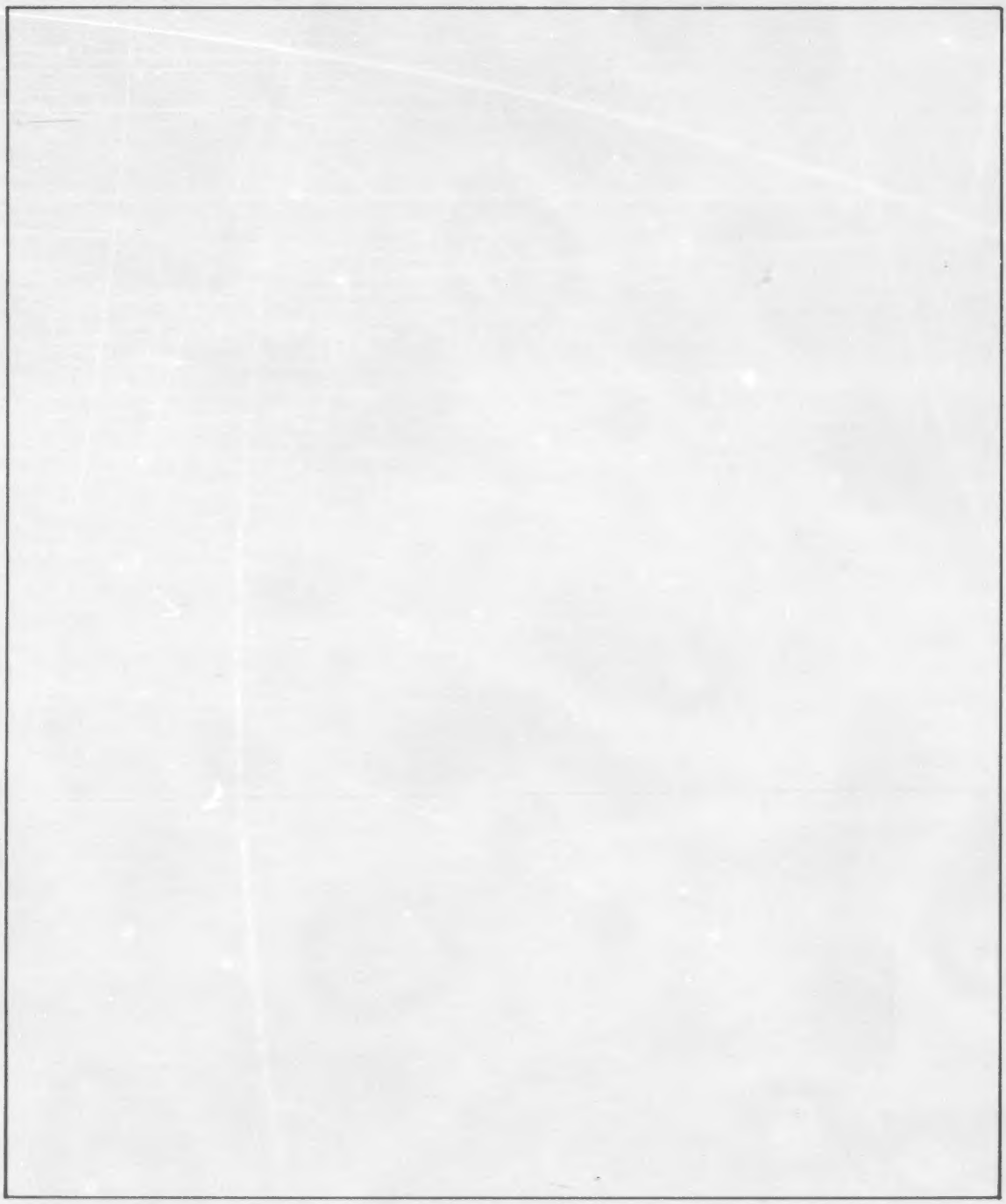
My mother said, "I guess so. I'm not sure."

"Momma," I said, "why is it that nothing's simple?"

"It's to make you think, dear," she said. "You like to think, don't you?"

"Gee," I said, "How do *I* know? I've never thought about it."

That was what my mother and I talked about the evening I came home from the zoo trip. The night I came home from the zoo trip was the night I got sick.



CHAPTER NINE

I wasn't the only one who got sick that night. Miranda got sick too. My mother thought it was some kind of virus. *We* thought it must have been something we ate. But boy, were we sick!

First I would throw up. Then there was Miranda jumping out of bed, with her hand over her mouth, racing for the bathroom.

There was even one time when we ran for the bathroom at the same time and banged our heads together over the toilet.

And our bones ached, and we had the awfulest headache. (Or did we have separate headaches? I'm not sure. If we had the same virus, couldn't we have had the same headache?)

At one time, during the night, we felt so awful, we just rolled around on our bed and groaned. I held my stomach and said, "I'm dying."

Miranda said, "Lucky you!"

By morning, we felt a little better. Still weak, but less pain. "Get up and get dressed," my mother said. "You're both going to the doctor."

We started to squawk. "Mom! Why couldn't Dr. Richards come here?"

All my mother said was, "Very funny."

The doctor's waiting room was jammed with parents and children. We read a year-old copy of *Highlights* that we had read before at the dentist's. Then we watched the tropical fish, and stared through the window at the rain falling on the doctor's car in the driveway.

Finally, the nurse told us to come in. She took us to the other room — not the one where the doctor was. (He had two rooms, and while he examined kids in one room, there would be other kids, in the other room, getting undressed or dressed.)

It wasn't the first time we had been to Dr. Richards'. But for some reason, when the nurse told us to get ready for the doctor, we started to giggle and couldn't stop.

I mean, we weren't able to stop until Dr. Richards walked in. That's when Miranda started to look real serious all of a sudden, and I started to sniffle. "You're going to give me a shot, aren't you, doctor?" I hollered.

"Only if I have to," Dr. Richards said.

"You'll have to!" I screamed. "You'll see! You'll have to!"

Dr. Richards thumped my chest and said, "The way you act, one would never know you were only nine years old." Then he thumped my back, listened with his stethescope, and said, "Lots of twelve-year-old kids don't behave as well as you."

"You're making fun of me," I grumbled.

"Open wide," he said, and stuck that wooden stick all the way down my throat. I thought to myself, "It's a good thing I don't have anything left to throw up."

Finally the doctor told us to get dressed, and told my mother that she should keep us home for a few days.

"All I want to know is whether it's catching," I said.

Dr. Richards said it wasn't.

"That's great!" I said. "I can have visitors!"

* * *

I thought Miranda and I would be better by the next day. But we weren't. In fact, we had to stay in bed for *five* days! Five days — can you imagine?

The first thing I thought about was that I wouldn't be in school when everyone told their mystery stories. I would miss hearing their stories, and I would miss telling my own!

That evening, when my father asked me how I felt, I said, "Miserable!" But partly I was miserable because I couldn't tell my story.

"If it makes you feel so bad," my father said, "why don't you invite your classmates to the house so that you can tell them your story here?"

"Oh, daddy," I said, giving him a big, smoochy kiss, "that would be wonderful. I'm going to call Isabel right away and tell her to invite the class here tomorrow afternoon!"

I got Isabel on the phone and said, "Isabel, please ask everyone in the class if they can come here tomorrow afternoon, after school, so I can tell them my story."

"Aw, Pixie," said Isabel, "that'll never happen. Kids have to go home on the bus, or they have things to do at home. They'll say, 'Why doesn't Pixie just wait until she comes back to school? Why do we have to come to her place just to hear her ol' story?' And what will I be able to tell them?"

"Isabel," I told her, "you're my friend. And I'm sick. Who knows — I may be dying! Wouldn't everyone be sorry if I *never* came back to school to tell my story? So how about asking them for me?"

Poor Isabel! I really made her feel bad. She said, "Okay, Pixie, I'll try. But I'm not going to promise *anything!*"

I'm glad Isabel agreed. If she'd said no, I would have asked her how she could refuse to do a little favor for a dying friend.

The next afternoon, I couldn't wait for the doorbell to ring. I was sure that everyone in the class would crowd into my bedroom, and sit on the floor around my bed while I told them my story.

Then the doorbell did ring, and in came Isabel and Geraldo and Willa Mae and Brian. "The others couldn't come," they told me.

For a moment I thought I was going to cry. "I wanted them *all!*" I said. But I didn't cry — although I kept on wanting to.

Then Willa Mae said, "Pixie, if you like, *we'll* tell your story to the others!"

Right away I felt better. "Oh, *would* you? Oh, Willa Mae," I said, "that would be super!"

So I told them my story, and they left, promising me again to tell the others.

I'm sure you would like to hear my mystery story too, just as I told it to Isabel and Brian and Geraldo and Willa Mae. But *did I ever promise you* I'd tell it to you? No, I *didn't!*

After school the next day, Isabel called to tell me what had happened. This is what happened:

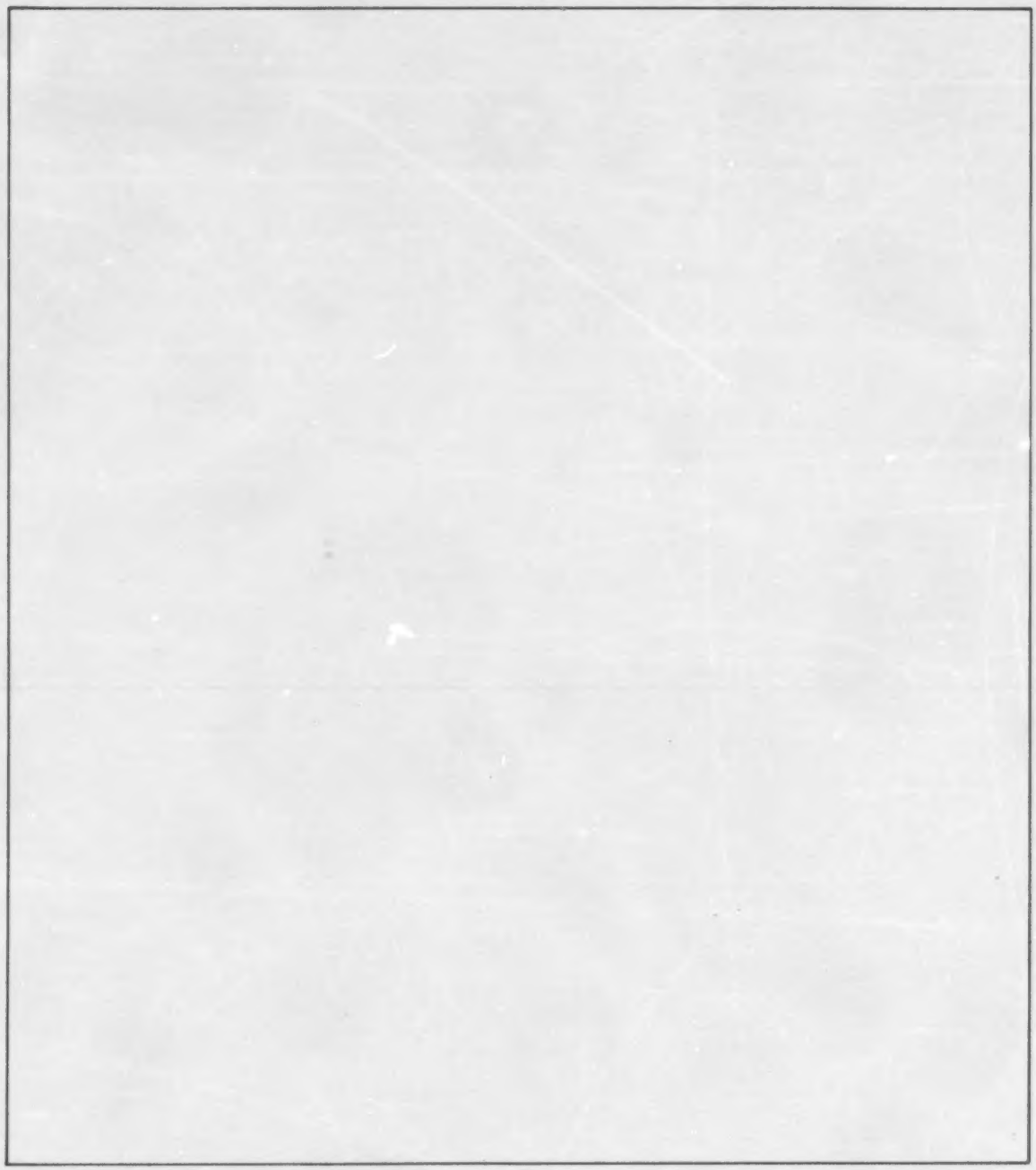
Isabel told my story to Kate, who told it to Rusty, who told it to Neil.

Geraldo told my story to Robert, who told it to Chita.

Willa Mae told my story to Jenny, who told it to Tommy.

And Brian didn't tell my story to anyone.

Then they all got together and made something up. Isabel wouldn't tell me what it was. All she would say was, "When you get back to school, Pixie, you're in for a *big* surprise. A really BIG surprise!



CHAPTER TEN

At first, the day I came back to school, nothing seemed any different. Nobody paid any special attention to me. It was as if they hardly even missed me.

I kept wondering what the surprise was going to be. Finally, Isabel and Willa Mae told me.

"Pixie," said Willa Mae, "your story got changed around by some people. So do you know what we decided to do? This afternoon, we're going to hear your story from the four last people who heard it told to them."

I said, "So my story has become four different stories?"

"In a way," said Isabel. When she saw me poke out my lower lip, she added, "I think you'll like them."

"Who are the story-tellers going to be?" I asked.

"Neil and Chita and Tommy and Brian," Isabel said.

"That's right," agreed Willa Mae. "But each storyteller will have a helper, who will ask questions. Neil's helper will be Jenny; Chita's helper will be Rusty; Tommy's helper will be Kate; and Brian's helper will be Robert."

"But what about Geraldo, and what about the two of you?" I asked.

"Oh," Willa Mae said, with a little laugh, "Geraldo wants to play his harmonica and Isabel wants to play her drum before each story. I'm director."

I clapped my hands. "It will be like a little play! A play in four acts!"

"That's right!" said Isabel. "And it will take place in the auditorium. But *we'll* all be on the stage, and only you and Mr. Mulligan will be the audience."

"This is really a surprise!" I told them. But to myself I said, "Hey, not bad for someone who thought a mammal was some kind of animal, and who's hardly been sick at all!"

But there was still more to the surprise. Because when we got to the auditorium, I saw that they had put a big refrigerator carton up on the stage.

"What's *that* for?" I asked Isabel.

"Brian told us he could work puppets," she explained. "So we made a stage out of the carton, and Brian and the others get inside."

Mr. Mulligan and I sat down together, about ten rows back from the stage. It seemed spooky being all alone like that in the auditorium. Then Willa Mae came to the front of the stage and announced:

Four Ways of Telling Pixie's Story

Right after that, Geraldo played something on his harmonica. At first he played loud, but then he played softer. There was a roll of the drum from Isabel. Suddenly two puppets poked up on top of the refrigerator box. They were two clowns. One had a little sign on a stick saying, "I'm Jocko," and the other's sign said, "I'm Bozo." Bozo also held another sign saying, 'Act I.' "

Here's what they said to each other:

Bozo: (played by Neil):

Once upon a time —

Jocko: (played by Jenny):

Oh, I just love stories. Go on, go on!

Bozo: Once upon a time —

Jocko: Tell me! Tell me! Start from the beginning!

Bozo: I'm *trying* to tell you! And I'm *trying* to start from the beginning. Anyhow, here we go again. Once upon a time, there was the biggest hurricane the world has ever seen.

Jocko: Did it pick up all the houses and animals and people, and spin them around and around, like the cyclone in *The Wizard of Oz?*

Bozo: Much worse.

Jocko: I just *love* Judy Garland.

Bozo: Judy Garland wasn't in the book. That was Dorothy. Judy Garland was in the *movie version* of the book.

Jocko: Tell me how the hurricane spun everything around!

Bozo: Do you remember the time we visited the dairy farm, and we went into the barn where they had that great big steel tub that they put the milk in?''

Jocko: I remember! I remember! It spun the milk around until it separated into skim milk and cream. (Here Jocko moved his hands in a circle to show how the machine worked, and how the cream was separated from the skim milk.)

Bozo: Right! Well, this hurricane spun people around until it separated their minds from their bodies.

Jocko: Oh, wow! I'll bet *that* was a mess! I can't even imagine what it would be like if people's minds didn't have any bodies attached to them, and their bodies didn't have any minds! What happened?

Bozo: Well, the bodies went around looking for their minds, and the minds went around looking for

their bodies. But there were a lot of mistakes. Lots of bodies and minds got together that didn't really belong to one another. So they'd quarrel and fight, and then they'd separate and start looking all over again.

Jocko: Didn't *any* of them find out who they belonged to?

Bozo: At first only a few. But as time went on, more and more of them did.

Jocko: It must be so nice to discover your mind. I wish I could! Where could I have lost it? I've looked everywhere — under the bed, and in the bathtub, and in the kitchen, but I just can't find it *anywhere,* so I just have to make do with what I have.

Bozo: You're not the only one. Because of that hurricane, there are lots of bodies throughout the world still searching for their minds, and lots of minds still looking for their bodies.

Jocko: Oh, my! Have they reported it to the Missing Persons Bureau?

Bozo: It's no use — they only look for persons.

At this point both Bozo and Jocko disappeared into the carton, then came up a moment later with a banner reading: END OF ACT I.

* * *

Neil and Jenny came out of the carton, and Chita and Rusty went in. They would be the voices for Part II. But of course Brian stayed in there, because he had to work the puppets. Geraldo played us a tune on his harmonica, and we were ready for Part II. All at once, two puppets popped out of the carton. One was a magician with a top hat, a black cloak, big moustaches, and a saw. The other was a lady whose head came out of one end of a box and whose feet came out of the other end. This was the conversation:

Lady: (played by Chita):
Are you going to saw me in half?

Magician: (played by Rusty):
That's my job. Besides, I have nothing better to do today.

Lady: Couldn't you wait until I tell you a story?

Magician: It better be a good one!

Lady: All right! Once upon a time, before there were people, and before there was even a world, there was just a steady rain. Everywhere.

Magician: That's a lot of raindrops!

Lady: Well, they weren't exactly raindrops. They were candies!

Magician: Candies! How sweet! What sort of candies were they?

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Lady: All sorts: jawbreakers and peppermint sticks and chocolate covered raisins and lollipops — just about every kind you could imagine, and then some.

Magician: Were they all different sizes?

Lady: Yes, and all different shapes, too. They weren't just round or flat. They had all sorts of little hooks and angles so that, as they fell, they kept getting tangled up with one another.

Magician: Very sticky, if you ask me.

Lady: Pretty soon, there were big masses of falling candies. They smashed up everything in their path. And they fell and fell and fell.

Magician: Didn't they ever stop falling?

Lady: Yes, after a very long time. They slowed down, and then they stopped altogether. The big ones turned into earth. The ones that had fallen fastest turned into water, and became rivers and oceans. And the ones that broke up into candy dust floated off and became the sky.

Magician: Oh, so that explains why the world is so full of different colors — reds and purples and greens and golds — because those were the colors of the candies! But what about people? When did they arrive?

Lady: At first, there were only parts of people —

Magician: — like someone had shaken up a boxful of gingerbread men?

Lady: Right! There were feet and legs and ears and noses and fingers and shoulders, all of them just sort of wandering around, trying to find one another.

Magician: You mean, arms and legs wandered alone! I find that hard to believe.

Lady: I didn't ask you to believe; all I asked you to do was listen. Anyhow, that's what happened in my story. Fingers looked for hands, toes looked for feet, tongues looked for mouths, and ears looked for heads.

Magician: And what happened when people finally got themselves together?

Lady: They weren't happy by themselves, so they formed families. And the families formed tribes, and the tribes turned into nations.

Magician: You don't say!

Lady: Yes, I do. And the people began to talk to one another. But first they had to invent words. They gave names to things — like 'mountain' and 'tree.' And they gave names to people — like 'John' and 'Mary'.

Magician: Very clever! Who would have thought to call

mountains 'mountains'? But go on with your story. Did everyone live happily ever after?

Lady: No, not at all. The words were very unhappy, just as the separate arms and ears and noses had been unhappy. The nouns wanted verbs to go with, and the verbs wanted nouns.

Magician: I understand perfectly! The words 'dogs' and 'bark' thought they were made for each other! And the same with the words 'ducks' and 'quack.'

Lady: Yes, and pretty soon, whole sentences of words came to be grouped together.

Magician: How touching! So that's how people started to talk!

Lady: Yes, and after they had been talking for a long time, they began thinking.

Magician: Is that the end of your story?

Lady: Yes, but would you like to hear—

Magician: That won't be necessary, thank you. (Begins to saw madly. Saws through box. Lady steps out of box completely unharmed. She and magician hold up their hands and bow to the audience. Then they bring out their banner: End of Act II.)

* * *

Now it was Chita and Rusty's turn to come out of the carton. The next pair to go in was Tommy and Kate. Act III was like the other two acts, except that the puppets were the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. When Isabel had finished playing her drum, this is what we heard:

Scarecrow: (played by Kate):

Tin Woodman, I know I'm together again — but I feel so — so — scattered!

Tin Woodman: (played by Tommy):

If *you* feel scattered — and you're so wise — how do you think *I* feel?

Scarecrow: How *do* you feel?

Tin Woodman: Every part of me is rusting, and I'm worried! If I replace all my parts again, will I still be me? You have brains — tell me!

Scarecrow: What I'll tell you is — a story!

Tin Woodman: A story! Does it begin with "Once upon a time. . .?"

Scarecrow: Yes, it does. Once upon a time, before there were people, like us, there were only parts. There were stacks of ears, and piles of noses, and heaps of eyes all over the place.

Tin Woodman: What was needed was an assembly-line.

Scarecrow: Yes, but for a long while nothing happened. Finally the time came to put things together and get them to work. So the parts were asked, "Who wants to do the seeing?" and "Who wants to do the tasting?" and "Who wants to do the walking?"

Tin Woodman: I'll bet I know what happened: lots of big arguments broke out because the ears and the eyes and the noses all wanted to see, and the hands and the feet all wanted to run, and the mouths and the thumbs wanted to hear.

Scarecrow: You're right — it was a mess! The eyes were given the job of tasting, and they kept complaining, "We can't taste anything because there isn't enough light!" And the ears were supposed to smell, but they complained they couldn't smell anything because there was too much noise.

Tin Woodman: I guess they had to take the jobs back and then give them out all over again.

Scarecrow: Right. But this time it was done correct-

ly. The eyes were told their only job was to see, and the ears were told that their only job was to hear.

Tin Woodman: So everyone lived happily ever after.

Scarecrow: No, I'm afraid not. No one was happy. The best pair of eyes would say, "We're really no good, because we can't run." And the best noses would say, "Look at us — we're worthless! We can't hear!"

Tin Woodman: They were very foolish! Were there others who wanted to be what they weren't?

Scarecrow: Oh, sure. There were grown-ups who wanted to be children, and children who wanted to be grown-ups. There were cats that wanted to be people and people that wanted to be cats.

Tin Woodman: All I ever wanted was to be a tin woodman with a heart! Now that I have it, will I ever change?

Scarecrow: Not as long as the story we're in stays the same.

Tin Woodman: That's nice. Tin hearts rust. But a story heart can last forever. I like that.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The last story was Brian's. Robert was there in the carton with him, but Brian had to work the puppets and tell the story at the same time.

When the puppets appeared, I was very surprised. It wasn't anything make-believe. One puppet was an ordinary-looking boy, and the other was an ordinary-looking girl. Then the boy lifted up a sign that said, "I'm Brian," and the girl's sign read, "I'm Pixie." Can you imagine!

Brian played himself. But Robert had to make his voice real squeaky in order to make believe he was me:

Brian: At night, Pixie, when you look up at the sky, what do you see?

Pixie: Stars.

Brian: Well, that's what people tell us — that we see stars. But what do we really see?

Pixie: We see — lights!

Brian: Okay, that's where my story will begin — with those lights.

Pixie: But first you've got to say, "Once upon a time. . ." Brian, you've *got* to!

Brian: Sure, why not? Once upon a time, the lights that we see by the millions and billions and trillions in the sky — the lights we call stars — they weren't stars at all then.

Pixie: Brian — you're making this all up! If they weren't stars, what were they?

Brian: Ideas.

Pixie: Ideas! Ideas of what?

Brian: Ideas of everything. Ideas of frying pans and koorknobs and flying saucers and numbers and chocolate chip cookies. . .

Pixie: Were there ideas of things you can't touch?

Brian: Like what?

Pixie: Like friendship and beauty and goodness?

Brian: Yes, there were ideas of all those things.

Pixie: Were there ideas of hate and ugliness and badness?

Brian: I-I'm not so sure. I don't think so.

Pixie: Were there ideas of icky things like mud and hair and dirt?

Brian: I'm not so sure about that either. Maybe.

Pixie: Were they *really, really* ideas?

Brian: Yes, and each of them was perfect. The idea of the chair was the perfect idea of the perfect chair. The idea of the kitchen sink was the perfect idea of the perfect kitchen sink. And the idea of goodness was the perfect idea of perfect goodness.

Pixie: If they were all that perfect, they must have been very happy.

Brian: That's just it: they weren't. They weren't satisfied with being ideas. They wanted to be *things* too. For example, the idea of the pillow said to the idea of the bed, "I want to be a real pillow, made of real feathers, so that when a person puts her head down on me, she'll say, "Now that's a *really* soft pillow."

Pixie: And what did the ideas of beauty and goodness have to say?

Brian: They said, "We're tired of just shining up here in the sky, where nothing ever happens. We want to be really beautiful things and really good people."

Pixie: So what happened?

Brian: They picked the planet Earth to be the place where they would do what they wanted to do.

Pixie: And when the ideas came to Earth — what happened then?

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Brian: They discovered that they had their work cut out for them.

Pixie: The ideas were put to work?

Brian: Nothing had any shape. Everything was just blobs of stuff.

Pixie: There were no chairs or horses or people?

Brian: Not until the ideas came. The ideas gave shape to the blobs.

Pixie: The way you take some snow and make a round snowball? Or the way you take a knife and cut some fudge into squares?

Brian: Well, I'm not sure. I think it was more like — like sharing.

Pixie: Sharing? The way Isabel and I share being friends?

Brian: In a way, yes. Wherever there's a relationship, there's a sharing.

Pixie: Brian, I can't guess what you mean. You'll have to tell me.

Brian: You know how Mr. Mulligan will read us a story, and we'll all share in listening to it?

Pixie: Sure, but —

Brian: Okay! Before the story, wasn't your mind just a blob, but then the story put it in order?

Pixie: You mean that's what the ideas did — gave shape to things and put them in order? Give me a for instance.

Brian: Well, the idea of the chair gave shape to wood, so that umpteen-thousand chairs could be made out of wood, according to that idea. And the same with the idea of the table. There's no limit to the number of things that can share a single idea.

Pixie: Brian, in addition to ideas of things, were there ideas of persons?

Brian: Yes, but with persons it was different. You see, no matter how many chairs there were, there was still only one idea of a chair. But for each and every person, there was a different idea.

Pixie: When something happened to a thing, did anything happen to the idea of that thing? I mean, if a chair got burned up, did the idea of the chair get burned up too?

Brian: No, nothing can destroy ideas. The things that share in those ideas can get destroyed, but not the ideas.

Pixie: And is it the same with people?

Brian: It could be. Abraham Lincoln was killed, but was the idea of Abraham Lincoln killed?

Pixie: Brian, were the ideas happy when they got here?

Brian: No, coming here made many of them miserable.

Pixie: It did! Why?

Brian: See, in the sky, where they had been, they were perfect and everything around them was perfect. If you were an idea, you lived among perfectly brave deeds and perfectly beautiful towns and perfectly true sentences.

Pixie: Oh, I get it now! When they came here, they found everything shapeless and ugly.

Brian: Yes, and even though they did their best to give shape to things, nothing ever came out quite right. In fact, most houses are ugly, and lots of sentences are false, and not many people do nice things.

Pixie: I'll bet the ideas kept saying, "Things weren't like this back where we came from!"

Brian: Not at first. You see, when an idea would come here, it would forget how wonderful and how perfect everything was in the sky where it came from.

Pixie: Forget? You mean all their memories would be wiped out, and they wouldn't remember a thing of that wonderful world?

Brian: Yes, but every now and then, an idea would have something good happen to it.

Pixie: Something good? Like what?

Brian: Oh, in the middle of all the ugliness, it might see a beautiful animal. Or in the middle of all the bad things people do to one another, it might

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see someone do something good.

Pixie: Or it might hear someone tell the truth for a change?

Brian: Right. And when things like that would happen, the idea would suddenly remember all that it had forgotten. It would remember the beautiful world it had come from, where it had been surrounded by perfect ideas, and where everything was true and good.

Pixie: Is that why, when we go to the movies, and at the end of the film, when the good guys win and the bad guys lose, we just can't help crying for joy, because we're so happy to be for a minute where everything comes out right?

Brian: Yes, I think so. And that's why we sort of shiver when we see something beautiful or when we discover something true. It's like we're back home where we belong again, and we're happy.

Suddenly, just when we thought the show was all over, the two puppets were pulled down, and Robert stuck his head out of the box. In a loud voice, Robert said, "I don't know whether that was Pixie's story or Brian's story, but in either case, it was stupid! All this make-believe about stars really being ideas that come to earth and give shape to everything! Who ever heard anything so silly?

Then Brian stuck his head up and said, "But Robert,

do you have a different story?''

''No, but I can tell you what's wrong with yours, '' Robert said. ''Ideas are thoughts, and thoughts come from our brains. And things all have their own shapes — they didn't get them from the stars! Boy, how mixed up can you get?''

Brian didn't get mad. He just laughed, and asked, ''So how come what I said was a fairy-tale and what you just said wasn't?''

''It's simple,'' said Robert. ''The ideas in a fairy-tale are not like the way things are in the world. In a true story, they are.''

''Oh,'' said Brian, ''well, in that case, if what I said was a fairy-tale, what you said was a fairy-tale too.''

I was hoping Brian would explain what he meant, but just then, Tommy called out, ''Robert, stop arguing with Brian. Why are you busting into his story, anyhow?''

Robert was about to answer Tommy, but Brian answered for him: ''Don't blame Robert. It happened at the end just the way he and I planned it.''

We all thought that was very funny.

Robert asked me, ''Which of the four versions was most like your story, Pixie?''

I said, ''None of them. They were all very different from mine.''

Neil said, ''Aw, Pixie, stop trying to tease us. Just tell

us all your story and be done with it.''

I laughed. ''Neil, you must think I'm silly. As long as I *don't* tell you my story, I get treated to four-act puppet shows! And who knows, they may go on and on — as long as I don't tell.''

''But at least,'' said Isabel, ''we know the story of how your mystery story came about.''

''And we know what your mystery creature was,'' said Neil. ''So we know two of your mysteries.''

Neil always thinks he's so smart! I said to him, ''Are you sure?''

''Of course I'm sure,'' he answered, with a big grin.

''Well, then,'' I said, ''I have just one question. How do you *know*?''

''How do I know what your mystery creature was?'' he asked. ''That's stupid! How does anyone know anything?''

''Ah, Neil,'' I said, ''isn't that the third mystery?''